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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 7 December 2017**

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 7 December 2017*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Leaving the EU: Animal Welfare**

1. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What plans he has to improve animal welfare standards after the UK leaves the EU. [902790]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** With just two short weeks before the Christmas recess, may I take this opportunity to wish you, Mr Speaker, and all the staff of the House, who do such a superb job, a happy and peaceful Christmas and a prosperous new year?

We have some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world. The Government are making CCTV mandatory in slaughterhouses, increasing maximum sentences for animal cruelty to five years, banning microbeads that harm marine life, and banning the ivory trade. On leaving the European Union we will go even further.

**Henry Smith:** The Secretary of State has done more for animal welfare in recent months than was achieved in many years previously, and we all owe him a debt of gratitude for that. Will he assure the House that as we will be leaving the EU, the customs union and the single market in 2019, we are making preparations now to ensure that, for example, the banning of live animal exports and the import of foie gras can be achieved?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend has been a passionate and successful campaigner for animal welfare during his entire career in the House of Commons, and he is right to say that there are now opportunities to take steps to improve the treatment of live exports—or potentially to ban them—as we leave the European Union. The steps that we take when we put animal welfare at the heart of all we do must be consistent with our broader negotiating objectives as we leave the EU.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): On animal welfare standards, whether we are in the EU or outside it, will the Secretary of State consider the importance of labelling so that people know what they are buying? When a label

says that a chicken has been reared outside or been stunned or not stunned, people must be able to trust that they know what has happened.

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman is right: there is confusion and uncertainty in the minds of some consumers as a result of current labelling. Already, farmer-led schemes such as the Red Tractor scheme ensure that people know that animals have been kept to the highest welfare standards, but we can go further and I look forward to working with the hon. Gentleman on that.

15. [902806] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): As we prepare to leave the EU it is vital that we maintain our strong standards of animal welfare law and use Brexit to enhance them, not diminish them by reverting to the lower standards permitted by EU law. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the Government will seek to enhance our welfare laws as we leave, including in areas where single market rules currently block us from doing so?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend makes a very acute point. It is in the nature of single market rules and the European Union that some animal husbandry practices, which we would not tolerate in this country, apply to things that we sometimes import. We must consider how we can improve animal welfare standards all round.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State set out what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government about moving forward on animal welfare once we leave the EU, regarding both that Government's responsibilities and the responsibilities that will come back from Europe to the Secretary of State?

**Michael Gove:** I commend Lesley Griffiths, the Welsh Labour Minister who is responsible for this area in the Welsh Assembly Government, for the constructive way in which she has engaged with DEFRA over the past six months. I hope to see her next week to carry forward discussions on this and other areas.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I very much welcome higher welfare standards, cameras in slaughterhouses, and tougher sentencing, but as we enhance our welfare, we will also add cost to production. We want to ensure that our consumers eat high-quality product with high welfare standards, and that we do not import inferior quality meat with lower welfare standards.

**Michael Gove:** The Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee makes an excellent point—I know that the Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the impact of leaving the European Union on food standards overall. Critical to high food standards is the viability and improved productivity of our farmers who do such a wonderful job.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The Northern Ireland Assembly has passed more stringent legislation on animal cruelty than the UK mainland. What discussions has the Secretary of State's Department had with the Northern Ireland Assembly about bringing similar measures into operation in England and Wales?

**Michael Gove:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are many ways in which Northern Ireland sets higher standards than we do in the rest of the UK, and I have always taken the view that we can learn a great deal from every part of the United Kingdom, not least the cherished Province which I love so much.

#### **Future Trade Agreements: Agriculture**

2. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on promoting UK agriculture in negotiations on future trade agreements. [902791]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** Ministers and officials meet regularly to discuss the promotion of UK agriculture. Only last night I was talking to the Secretary of State for International Trade, to ensure that in the next 12 months we place the promotion of British food at the heart of our joint governmental endeavours.

**John Howell:** As the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Nigeria, I recently hosted a visit of the Nigerian Agriculture Minister to the UK. Does the Secretary of State accept that the UK is leading in innovation and education in agriculture, and that we have a lot to offer that country?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend has done an outstanding job as trade envoy to one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and there is much that we can do together to improve the transfer of technology between our two countries. Nigeria offers huge opportunities to our exporters, which I know my hon. Friend has done much to help to advance.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Surely the Secretary of State realises that the food and farming sector is terrified about the impact of leaving the European Union? Does he agree that the fact there has been no impact assessment by him or his Department on what will happen to farming in food in this country is a disgrace?

**Michael Gove:** No.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): Will the Secretary of State impress on the International Trade Secretary the fact that it is not just about goods, but about services? Will he join me in congratulating the British Horse Society on its 70th anniversary year and on being invited to provide an accreditation system for riding centres in China?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend, who did an outstanding job when she was Secretary of State, is absolutely right. No country in the world has a finer equestrian tradition than our own. We can build on that tradition to ensure that services are provided to international markets.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Is there anyone, other than the Secretary of State and the Legatum Institute, who thinks that a free trade deal with Trump's America would be good for British farming and the UK food chain?

**Michael Gove:** Yes.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): As everyone in this House will know—as a fellow Scot, the Secretary of State will know it very clearly—Scotland has some of the largest protected food names in the EU, with high-value products such as Scotch beef and Scotch salmon accounting for some £700 million in sales, yet there has been absolutely nothing from the Government on whether that will continue post Brexit. Will he give a clear indication and a clear commitment today that our participation in this vital scheme will continue or be replaced within the UK?

**Michael Gove:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, who has in his role been a passionate and effective advocate for Scottish industry. Yes, we want to make sure that geographical indicators and schemes that ensure high-quality foods from all parts of the United Kingdom are recognised within Europe and across the world. We want to ensure that appropriate schemes exist in the future so that we can provide recognition to our trading partners, as well as ensuring that the markets we care so much about are protected.

#### **Pulse Fishing**

3. **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to tackle pulse fishing in EU waters. [902792]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** There are some concerns about the impact of pulse trawling on certain species of fish, in particular gadoids such as cod. Earlier this year, I asked the Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science to review the science on pulse trawling. The preliminary advice concludes that while the impact on the seabed is typically smaller than for traditional beam trawling, there are some detrimental effects on fish species such as cod. Once CEFAS has completed its work, we will decide what steps are required next.

**Mr Bradshaw:** I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. He will be aware, I am sure, of the concerns of fishers in parts of south-east England about the impact of Dutch electric pulse fishing on the stocks that, surprise surprise, move across national boundaries and are consequently shared. At the moment, we have a voice at the table and we can influence, alongside other more conservation-minded northern European countries, policies such as that on electric pulse fishing. How will we exert the same influence if we leave the European Union?

**George Eustice:** The right hon. Gentleman is right that pulse trawling is predominantly carried out by about 84 Dutch vessels, which mostly fish in UK waters to catch those species. Once we leave the European Union, we will decide the terms of access. That will give us the clarity and the ability to be able to ban certain approaches if we want to.

**Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): The European Union is currently proposing draconian measures for our recreational sea anglers. They will stop recreational fishing for half the year. These ridiculous proposals should be resisted. I seek assurances from the Minister that he will stand up for our recreational sea anglers.

**George Eustice:** The situation with bass is precarious, which is why I and the UK Government pressed for emergency measures three years ago. However, we believe it is important that the current International Council for the Exploration of the Sea advice is benchmarked to take account of measures that have already been brought in. We will be arguing for a more proportionate package this December.

#### Leaving the EU: Food Prices

4. **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect on food prices of the UK leaving the EU. [902793]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** The key drivers of food price changes are exchange rates, weather events and oil prices. These factors affect all countries in the world, whether they are members of the European Union or independent nation states. We therefore assess the impact of leaving the EU on retail food prices to be marginal.

**Gill Furniss:** During the EU referendum campaign, the Secretary of State claimed that food prices would fall after a vote for Brexit, yet new data from the Office for National Statistics shows that food prices last month were up by 4.2% on 12 months earlier. My constituents will be feeling the pinch of those increases this Christmas. Will the Minister confirm that an analysis of food prices has been conducted, and that it is not just in his imagination? If he has published that analysis, when will it be in the public domain?

**George Eustice:** In the 18 months leading up to the referendum food prices fell by 7%, and in the 18 months since they have risen by 4%. Changes in food prices of plus or minus 5% are fairly typical. The fact is that whether a country is inside or outside the EU, the key drivers of food prices—weather events, exchange rates and oil prices—remain the same.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): What discussions has the Minister held with the Department for International Trade about assessing the current EU non-tariff barriers on the pig products that are so important not only to my constituency, but to the broader constituency area of Suffolk?

**George Eustice:** I am aware that the pig industry is very important to my hon. Friend's constituency. The UK has a close relationship with Denmark. Danish Crown, including its subsidiary Tulip, is a major investor in the UK, and since the decision to leave the European Union it has increased its investment, with the recent acquisition of new businesses. We are having discussions, but we have a strong and vibrant pig sector.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): The Minister said that Brexit would not have much impact on prices. I suggest that he speak to his former Conservative colleague Laura Sandys, the head of the Food Foundation, which has said that Brexit could mean an increase of £158 a year in what the average family spends on fruit and veg. Will he ensure that the horticultural sector, which has been much neglected by successive Governments, is given the priority that it deserves in the agriculture Bill?

**George Eustice:** As the hon. Lady may know, I studied horticulture and worked in the horticultural industry for 10 years. As we design a new agriculture policy, there is a real opportunity to support innovation in all sectors, including horticulture.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What about the price of animals for live export? Is there any prospect of banning that grisly trade altogether?

**George Eustice:** As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out earlier, once we have left the European Union, banning the export of live animals will become a possibility, and we have a manifesto commitment to restrict and control it further.

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): The UK now has the second highest rate of food insecurity in Europe. In October, food and drink prices increased faster than at any other point over the last four years, and the latest Trussell Trust figures show a 13% increase on last year in the number of emergency food parcels issued. How will the Secretary of State and the Minister address the shameful increase in hunger and food poverty that is taking place throughout the country on this Government's watch?

**George Eustice:** The key benchmark that Governments of all colours have studied for many years is the Living Costs and Food Survey. We know that over the last 15 to 20 years, the spending of the poorest 20% of households on food has remained constant at about 16.5%.

**Sue Hayman:** With all due respect, I do not think that that really answered my question. Yesterday the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union admitted that Ministers had carried out no proper assessment of the impact of Brexit on any UK economic sector. Food prices are rising. What assessment has DEFRA made of the impact of Brexit on those prices?

**George Eustice:** As I have said, we are carrying out this work, but our current assessment is that the impact is marginal. Economists sometimes make the mistake of not taking account of the fact that we have tariff rate quotas—that means that we already have a high degree of tariff-free trade—and the fact that the commodity price represents only a small part of the overall value of the shopping basket.

#### Abattoirs

5. **Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): What steps he is taking to ensure the availability of vets for abattoirs after the UK leaves the EU. [902794]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** Veterinarians play a vital role in safeguarding UK public health, enabling trade and maintaining animal health and welfare. More than 31% of the UK veterinary workforce is supplied by veterinarians from outside the UK. We cherish and value their work, and we want to ensure that they can continue to make an important contribution.

**Tim Farron:** I appreciate the Secretary of State's reply. Britain leads the world in both food hygiene and animal welfare, but that is now at risk. The British Veterinary Association reckons that 95% of the vets in our abattoirs are from the EU, and that many of them are leaving. Will the Secretary of State release the impact assessment that I am certain he will have carried out, and will he tell us what action he is taking to protect our meat industry, animal welfare and food safety from that clear and imminent threat?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. He is right: more than 90% of the veterinarians in our abattoirs come from the EU27 countries, and I and my Department have been talking to representatives of the profession to ensure that those who do such a wonderful job continue to feel valued and to play the important role they do in assuring the public of the very high standards of food hygiene.

**Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the slaughter of UK animals should take place in UK abattoirs overseen by appropriately qualified vets, and will he take steps to ensure that the evil and cruel trade of live animal exports is ended when we leave the EU?

**Michael Gove:** I commend my hon. Friend for his campaigning on this issue, and, as he points out, as we leave the EU there are opportunities to review and change our approach to live exports, and to ensure higher standards of animal welfare.

#### Leaving the EU: Farming

6. **Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con):** What steps he is taking to maintain the economic viability of farming after the UK has left the EU. [902795]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** The common agricultural policy has been a bureaucratic quagmire that has undermined British agriculture and failed our environment. Leaving the EU allows us to bring clarity and purpose to agriculture policy in the UK for the first time for 45 years. We are committed to introducing an agriculture Bill in this Session and will outline further plans next year.

**Alex Burghart:** I am grateful to the Minister for his remarks. Many farmers in my constituency in the bounteous county of Essex supported Brexit, but some did not. What reassurances can he give them that the Government are straining their many sinews to ensure that new and emerging food markets are open to them after Brexit?

**George Eustice:** We will be working with colleagues in the Department for International Trade to open up new markets. There are opportunities, particularly in sectors such as dairy. We have also been very clear that we will maintain the agriculture budget for this Parliament—that is a manifesto commitment—and that we will have a smooth transition from the policy we have now to the new policy.

**David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** Has the Minister seen Wednesday's press release from the Farmers Union of Wales, which said:

“Denying Wales access to the Single Market and Customs Union would have catastrophic consequences”  
on farming in Wales? Would he care to comment?

**George Eustice:** I very regularly meet members of the FUW, and we absolutely recognise the importance of tariff-free trade with the EU. That is why this Government's clear position is that we want a comprehensive and ambitious free trade agreement.

#### EU Convergence Uplift Funding

7. **Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP):** What recent discussions he has had with the (a) Scottish Government and (b) National Farmers Union of Scotland on EU convergence uplift funding. [902796]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** I met the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, Fergus Ewing, on 6 November, when we discussed EU convergence uplift funding, and I most recently met the National Farmers Union of Scotland on 31 October, when that funding was one of a number of issues discussed. I look forward to seeing the Scottish Cabinet Secretary next Thursday, and also, thanks to the intercession of my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark), to meeting representatives of the NFU of Scotland on that day as well.

**Martyn Day:** Back in September, key farming organisations, including the NFUS, wrote to the Minister on convergence uplift. I have been told that the Government have not yet responded. Why have they not responded, and will the Minister fix the scandal now by committing to give Scottish farmers the £160 million they are rightfully due?

**Michael Gove:** I absolutely recognise, and indeed have explained to the hon. Gentleman's Scottish National party colleague, that the issue of convergence uplifting is ripe for reassessment. I have discussed the issue not just with the Scottish Cabinet Secretary, but with farming union representatives, and I know it will be raised when we meet next week.

#### Flood Defences

8. **Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con):** What recent assessment he has made of the resilience of flood defences in Cumbria. [902797]

12. **Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con):** What recent assessment he has made of the resilience of flood defences. [902802]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** The resilience of flood defences is good. In October, the Environment Agency's assessment showed that over 95% of the flood defence assets it maintains in the highest risk areas were at, or above, the target condition, and in Cumbria the proportion was 97.5%. We have repaired all the flood defences damaged in the winter of 2015. We know there is more to do to help communities in Keswick as well as

other parts of Copeland and across Cumbria. That is why we allocated £58 million extra for flood risk management schemes.

**Trudy Harrison:** I am grateful for that response. However, £800,000 was pledged for my community in Braithwaite, which was devastated in Storm Desmond. Two years on, can the Minister please confirm when the work will be completed for that village?

**Dr Coffey:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of that particular village. I am aware that the shortlisting of options is due to be completed next month, with a target date of the end of 2019. I will be meeting her and her colleagues from Cumbria next week to discuss the details further.

**Julian Sturdy:** Hard flood defences such as the Foss barrier and whole catchment management solutions are vital for cities such as York, but it is essential that those strategies equally protect smaller communities. Can the Minister assure me that communities south of York will not be forgotten as we progress and continue to develop flood management schemes?

**Dr Coffey:** I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. The York long-term plan will use a whole catchment approach to flood risk management. It includes upper catchment management changes, which will be a key component in reducing risk to York and other communities downstream, including the ones to which he refers. I can assure him that the modelling by the Environment Agency ensures that hard flood defences in York will not impact on the communities he has mentioned.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** It is two years since the devastating floods hit York, yet last week the residents of Clementhorpe learned that their barriers were going to be further delayed and that they will not have protection until at least 2019. What will the Minister do to ensure not only that that programme is speeded up, but that the residents of York are protected in the intervening period?

**Dr Coffey:** Since the floods of December 2015, when about 600 properties were flooded, we have invested £17 million to upgrade the Foss barrier. That includes eight high-volume pumps to provide an even greater standard of protection than before, and we have developed a five-year plan to invest £45 million in new defences that will better protect 2,000 properties.

**Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab):** Following Storm Desmond and Storm Eva in 2015, the Government made welcome direct payments for resilience work to residents who had been devastated by the flooding. Following the floods in Galgate last month, however, the Government told Lancaster City Council that that flooding was not severe enough to warrant the same assistance, despite 143 homes being vacated because of flood damage. Will the Minister make representations to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and urge him to allocate money to fund essential flood resilience work in flood-affected communities like Galgate, right across the country?

**Dr Coffey:** As I have indicated, the overall level of flood defence resilience is good, including in Lancashire. I am very concerned about the people who suffered that shock flooding the other week, and I will of course meet the affected MPs. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) is seeing me next week to discuss this very matter.

#### Leaving the EU: Departmental Preparation

9. **Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to prepare for the UK's departure from the EU. [902798]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) put in place a major programme of work to prepare for the UK's departure from the European Union, planning for a number of scenarios, and we in DEFRA keep the effectiveness of that work under continual review. It is led by outstanding civil servants, to whom I wish to pay tribute now.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** We know that, in several areas, EU rules have prevented us from improving standards of animal welfare. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that he is now doing the detailed preparation so that on day one of our freedom, he will be ready to take action, including to ban the trade in the export of live animals?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. That work is being undertaken now, not just in the area to which he rightly alludes but in other areas of animal welfare.

**Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab):** By next summer, the UK chemical industry will have spent £250 million registering its chemicals. It is united in wanting to remain within the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—REACH—scheme and to avoid EU tariffs of between 4% and 6% on its goods, so why is the Secretary of State proposing to double its regulatory burden by setting up a new agency here? Why is he playing politics with our second largest manufacturing sector?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Lady has been a consistent champion of the work that is done in our world-leading chemicals industry. We are seeking to find the right regulatory framework to ensure that we can continue to do good work.

**Mr Speaker:** I think that the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) is now conscious. He has a question on the Order Paper that is not entirely unadjacent to the subject of which we are now treating.

11. [902801] **David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** On this very point, Sir, does my right hon. Friend agree that we absolutely have to continue our support for glyphosate, which protects the environment by reducing the need for excess tillage and to use other herbicides? With he continue to support this safe herbicide once Brexit has taken place?

**Mr Speaker:** Well done!

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I am delighted that Phil Hogan, the outstanding Commissioner for Agriculture, has secured assent for the reauthorisation of glyphosate for five more years. It is, as my hon. Friend makes clear, a valuable tool for ensuring that we can move towards no till or min till agriculture, which in itself is an environmental gain.

**Mr Speaker:** The Secretary of State clearly knows all this jargon very well. Listening to him this morning is quite an educational experience.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): My colleagues and I are working hard to try to get the Northern Ireland Executive restored, but in the absence of an Executive will the Secretary of State ensure that he has discussions with the permanent secretary at the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland to ensure that our sector and its niche markets are protected beyond March 2019?

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely. I am looking forward to representatives from DAERA coming to DEFRA next Thursday for the latest in our series of talks. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman and his Democratic Unionist party colleagues, who ensure that my ministerial colleagues and I are kept up to the mark with the policies that need to be shaped in the interests of Northern Ireland's farmers and fishermen, who do so much to ensure that there is healthy food on all our plates.

#### **Food and Drink Sector: Industrial Strategy**

10. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the food and drink sector in line with the industrial strategy. [902799]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** I am delighted that the industrial strategy White Paper, which sets out plans to boost productivity and earnings across the UK, recognises the importance of the food and drink sector, which is why we have announced a new food and drink sector council as part of the strategy.

**David Duguid:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. He will be more aware than most that, owing to the quality of the product, the seafood processing industry in my constituency is less concerned about access to markets after we leave the EU than it is about access to labour. What discussions has he had with representatives of the Scottish seafood processing industry or, indeed, the Home Office to address such concerns?

**Michael Gove:** There is no better champion of the Scottish fish processing industry than my hon. Friend, and it was thanks to his work that I was able to attend a roundtable in Aberdeen a couple of months ago, at which fish processors were able to put to me their specific demands. Since then, I have talked to the Home Secretary and the Immigration Minister about precisely those issues. I must say that were it not for my hon. Friend, that argument would not be happening at the heart of Government and it would not be being heard

and acted upon. He is a brilliant advocate, and the people of Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Mintlaw, Turriff and the other communities in his constituency are exceptionally lucky to have him.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) has just waved at the Chair, which may be analogous to, although not quite the same as, the conventional method of bobbing, but I am going to deduce that the hon. Gentleman is interested in contributing to our proceedings.

16. [902807] **Andrew Lewer** (Northampton South) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker; I am on a learning curve here. My constituency features a small bespoke brewery called Phipps, which is right next to the giant Carlsberg plant. Such a juxtaposition illustrates the vast range in brewing, and in the food and drink sector more widely, so will producers of all sizes be catered for within a sector deal in the industrial strategy?

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely. We all know that Carlsberg is primarily a brewer, but if Carlsberg did MPs, my hon. Friend would be the premium brand—fizzy with a great head and always a pleasure to spend time with of an evening. He is absolutely right that we need to ensure not only that major brewers can invest in this country, but that premium artisanal brewers have their interests represented, and that is what the industrial strategy will do.

**Mr Speaker:** All that remains is for the Secretary of State to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his characteristic acuity, which I know is a preferred phrase of the right hon. Gentleman. No doubt it will be in evidence at the next oral questions—we very much hope so.

#### **Leaving the EU: Environmental Law**

13. **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure the full transfer of EU environmental law to the UK after the UK leaves the EU. [902803]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill will ensure that the whole body of existing EU environmental law continues to have effect in UK law. Last month, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that we will consult on the creation of a new national policy statement on environmental principles and on a new independent and statutory body to hold the Government and, potentially, public authorities to account on their environmental commitments.

**Marsha De Cordova:** I thank the Minister for her response. The Government have boasted that they will leave the environment in a better state than they found it in, so does the Minister agree that we need to enshrine in law not only equivalent, but even better levels of environmental protections after we leave the EU?

**Dr Coffey:** I agree with the hon. Lady. We are absolutely committed to that, and it has been in our manifesto for the past two years. Aspects of the environment are

improving, and with our 25-year environment plan, which will be published shortly, we will continue to set out that agenda for the next generation.

### Leaving the EU: Puppy Welfare

14. **Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): What plans he has to ensure the welfare of puppies traded between the UK and EU countries after the UK leaves the EU. [902804]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** We are actively looking to see what we can do in this area. Leaving the European Union provides us with new opportunities to deal with the illegal trade in puppies.

**Angela Smith:** Will the Secretary of State confirm that, once the EU pet travel rules have been transferred to the UK statute book, the scheme will be reviewed as a priority, taking into account the recommendations of the Dogs Trust? As he well knows, the trust has campaigned tirelessly for a number of years to change and improve the scheme.

**Michael Gove:** It is not just the Dogs Trust that has campaigned; the hon. Lady has campaigned, too. She and the Dogs Trust are right that we need to look at the law. We hope to make announcements even before we leave the European Union about how the law can be improved.

I place on record my thanks to the Dogs Trust because, of the two dogs in the Gove family home, one is a rescue dog that the trust was responsible for finding.

### Topical Questions

T1. [902820] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** We discussed the vital importance of the veterinary profession during our earlier exchanges on the question from the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). I thank the nation's chief veterinary officer, Nigel Gibbens, for his years of service as he moves on and leaves the Department. He has done an outstanding job, and the country is grateful for his service.

**Ruth Cadbury:** The UK's terrible air pollution is getting worse and does not respect local authority boundaries. When can we expect an air quality plan that makes a real difference, or will the Secretary of State continue to shunt responsibility to councils that have neither the resources nor the powers to address this nationwide challenge?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** Air quality is actually improving. I recognise the challenges on roadside NOx, but hopefully the hon. Lady is aware of the £90,000 grant given directly to Ealing Council to help to address particulates. We are preparing a wider clean air strategy, with a consultation next year.

T2. [902821] **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): I, along with many colleagues, have been contacted by constituents with concerns about the vote against new clause 30 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, which was interpreted as an attempt to weaken the protection of animals. The Secretary of State and the Government have been very clear that we are committed to the highest standards of animal welfare, but will my right hon. Friend please provide absolute assurances that that will be the case as we leave the EU?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend has been a clear and consistent advocate for higher standards of animal welfare, both before and since she entered this House. It is absolutely the case that we are committed to ensuring not just that we recognise the principle of animal sentience, but that we provide appropriate and stronger protection in UK law. We will shortly be bringing forward proposals on the appropriate legislative vehicle for that protection.

T3. [902822] **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): It was good to see the Secretary of State supporting the Woodland Trust event in Parliament yesterday. What work is he doing with the Department for Communities and Local Government to strengthen protection for ancient woodland in the national planning policy framework?

**Michael Gove:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his work in this area. He has also been a great champion of the Woodland Trust's work. I met the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government yesterday to discuss precisely this issue, and I hope that we can bring forward proposals when the 25-year environment plan is published next year.

T7. [902826] **Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): I never tire of reminding the House that 40% of Scotch whisky distilleries are based in my Moray constituency. Will the Secretary of State outline the Government's continued support for this iconic Scottish industry?

**Michael Gove:** Thanks to my hon. Friend's advocacy, I have had the opportunity to visit one of the distilleries in his constituency. I hope to be able to visit many more over the next few weeks, months and years. He is a brilliant advocate for the interests of the Scotch whisky industry. There are huge opportunities as we leave the European Union. There has been a particularly dramatic increase in exports of single malts since 2000 because of the effective and principled advocacy of people like him. Whether it is Glenlivet or Aberlour, they roll around the tongue perfectly, and they both have no better advocate than my hon. Friend.

T4. [902823] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): A quarter of our rivers are at risk from unsustainable abstraction, which is a particular problem in the south and east. When will the Government actually take action to tackle unsustainable water abstraction?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** We have been considering this carefully. I hope that we will be able to make an announcement on the publication of our abstraction plan within the next month. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will enjoy reading it, and I am happy to discuss it with him later.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Cornish food and drink is some of the best in the world, whether it is our amazing dairy products, such as Rodda's cream, which is made in the constituency of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, or Tribute beer, which is brewed by St Austell. What conversations is the Secretary of State having with the Secretary of State for International Trade about the possible new markets for Cornish food and drink once we leave the EU?

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice)**: I thank my hon. Friend for mentioning Rodda's, which is obviously a world-leading food company. It has been very successful in exporting its cream to the far east and other markets. We are in regular discussions with the Department for International Trade and, as I said earlier, there are export opportunities for our great food producers.

T5. [902824] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): At DEFRA questions on 20 July, the Secretary of State was asked to confirm that article 13 of the Lisbon treaty, which, as we have heard, categorises animals as sentient beings, would be part of the repeal Bill. He replied: "Absolutely". Given that he then voted against the inclusion of article 13, what caused him to disagree with himself?

**Michael Gove**: I am tempted to quote from the American poet, whose name I temporarily forget, who made the point that "I contain multitudes". The truth is that we want to go further than existing EU law to protect animal welfare. A better legislative vehicle is available, and we will make an announcement about that next week.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Cats Protection has highlighted the fact that when the UK signed up to the EU pet travel scheme, we had to abandon the previous requirements that cats coming into the UK needed compulsory treatment against tapeworm and ticks. When we leave the EU, may we reinstate these regulations?

**Michael Gove**: I have two things to say. The first is that the poet whose name I temporarily forgot is, of course, Walt Whitman. The second is that the short answer to my hon. Friend's question is yes.

T6. [902825] **Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that following our withdrawal from the EU, farmers in my constituency will have a clear and accessible route to apply for stewardship and environmental schemes, because at the moment the process is arduous and complex?

**Michael Gove**: The hon. Lady makes a good point. Only last week we announced that we would be simplifying countryside stewardship and having four principal routes that farmers can take. I look forward to working with her to ensure that the farmers she represents have access to this money, which will ensure that her beautiful constituency receives the cash it needs for further environmental enhancement.

**Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): There was huge applause for the Government's decision to ban the UK ivory trade, but there is now growing evidence of an increase in the trade in hippo ivory. With only 100,000 or

so African hippos left, the slightest increase in demand could spell disaster for that species. May I urge Ministers to extend the proposed ban to include other ivory-bearing species such as hippo, narwhal, walrus and the like?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey**: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The scope of our proposed legislation is so far restricted to African and Asian elephants, but the consultation is still open, so I will take what he says as a submission. We are very keen to see what we can do to protect all endangered species and their habitats, and this may be one way of achieving that.

T8. [902827] **Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): About half of the veterinary surgeons registering in the UK qualified elsewhere in the EU. Will the Secretary of State tell the House what discussions he is having with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that their vital skills continue to receive due recognition post Brexit? Will veterinary professionals be able to come to the UK and work on exactly the same terms as they currently enjoy?

**George Eustice**: Such discussions are part of our planning. We want to put in place a close new partnership with our European partners, and trying to get an agreement on mutual recognition of some of these qualifications would be on that agenda.

**Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): When we leave the EU, the UK will be able to set its own farm support policy. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of whether, if the EU continues farm support, the UK will have to do so, because otherwise British farming could be severely disadvantaged?

**Michael Gove**: My hon. Friend is one of the most formidable and knowledgeable experts on the agri-food business in this House, and he is absolutely right to say that we need to keep pace with what is happening in other markets to ensure that we support farmers to continue the work that they do. It is thanks to his advocacy that National Farmers Union of Scotland representatives will be coming into DEFRA next Thursday, when I look forward to discussing how we can ensure that they and their colleagues get the support they deserve in the future.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Marriage Certificates: Equal Registration

1. **Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): What recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Government on enabling mothers to be registered on an equal basis with fathers on marriage certificates.

[902808]

2. **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): What recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Government on enabling mothers to be registered on an equal basis with fathers on marriage certificates.

[902809]

6. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): What recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Government on enabling mothers to be registered on an equal basis with fathers on marriage certificates. [902814]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman)**: I have had many recent discussions with Departments, particularly the Home Office, not least because of my Registration of Marriage (No. 2) Bill, which is in train. There is an identical Bill before the House of Lords that would achieve the same purpose of allowing mothers to sign marriage certificates. I am not precious about which Bill gets to the finishing line first—we just need to do it.

**Gillian Keegan**: There is agreement among Members on both sides of the House and across Government that the situation needs to change, so will my right hon. Friend make representations to our colleagues in government about their previous commitment to use Government time to get one of the Bills passed?

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: Yes. Many Members on both sides of the House have sought to achieve that end. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) for promoting an identical Bill, as well as the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees)—I want to emphasise that this is a cross-party issue—who presented a previous Bill. I received a letter from the Prime Minister in April in response to one that I sent. She absolutely acknowledges the commitment made in 2014 by her predecessor to achieve this, and recognises the need for primary legislation to make sure that the details of both parents can be on the certificate.

**Wendy Morton**: The signing of the register is a really valued part of the marriage service in churches right across the country. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that that will remain unchanged?

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: Yes, I reassure my hon. Friend that the registers will remain in the vestry for that all-important photo. Under the proposed new system, on which the Church has consulted, vicars will download a marriage certificate, which will be signed by the couple, as is currently the case, and the vicar will complete the form by filling in the parents' names, which explicitly gives the possibility of mothers being on the certificate in the future.

**Tim Loughton**: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's comprehensive answer, which leaves me little more to add, other than to ask whether she and the Church of England will support my Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc.) Bill, which is due for Second Reading on 2 February 2018 and includes those exact requirements. Will the Church of England also agree to back equal civil partnerships, through their extension to opposite-sex partnerships, as set out by the Bill?

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: The Church has no fixed view on equal civil partnerships but, in general, if they are for stable, committed and long-lasting relationships, they are likely to be beneficial, especially when children are involved. Personally I support that, and for that

reason I have rolled my Bill beyond the date for the consideration of my hon. Friend's Bill to give him an opportunity to make progress.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I have three daughters with children. They and many of my constituents want me to ask why this simple step forward for equality has taken so long.

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: I ask myself the very same question. There have been several attempts and undertakings, including by the previous Labour Government in 2002. I urge colleagues on both sides of the House to do everything they can to make sure that we achieve this change in the law and give fair wind to the Registration of Marriage (No. 2) Bill.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): It is good to hear what the right hon. Lady has to say. Will she also talk to the Church about making it easier for people to get married in church and, indeed, to have their children baptised? That would be real equality.

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: When answering that question on previous occasions, I have given examples of how churches reach out to the surrounding community so that the thought of getting married is not intimidating. It does not need to be expensive, either—getting married in church is probably the least part of what it actually costs to put on a wedding. I can point the hon. Gentleman towards our materials to encourage people to get married in church.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Given that 25% of households are single-parent households, and that 90% of those are mother-led households, does the right hon. Lady agree that the marriage certificate must take into account that large section of people who are overlooked, yet in real life watch over everything in the home?

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, which really came out in the Westminster Hall debate that I secured. A number of hon. Members who are themselves the children of a single parent—in most cases, the mother—were really disappointed to find out at the moment they got married that their mum, who had done everything possible to bring them up, was not, under existing law, able to sign the certificate as the parent. That is a very strong reason why the situation needs to change.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): My right hon. Friend's commitment on this issue is well known, and it is clear that both sides of the House are very supportive of what she, I and others have tried to achieve. Following her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), can she reaffirm that the Church, as it set out to me when I brought forward my private Member's Bill, remains supportive of what we are trying to achieve?

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: I would like to clear up any possible misunderstanding that the Church is in any way against making this change: the reverse is true. The Church has consulted on changing the marriage registration process. It will save money through the practical reality of moving to an electronic register. The General Register

Office is in favour of making the change, and there is cross-party and institutional support—let us just get it done.

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

*The hon. Member for Gainsborough, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission, was asked—*

### Police Force Financial Sustainability

3. **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): What the policy of the National Audit Office is on conducting regular reviews of the financial sustainability of police forces. [902810]

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): The National Audit Office's work programme is a matter for the Comptroller and Auditor General, not the Public Accounts Commission. The NAO does not audit individual police forces, but through its access to the Home Office it published the report "Financial sustainability of police forces in England and Wales" in June 2015.

**Louise Haigh**: I am grateful for that answer. An independent assessment of police force funding would be welcome, not just on an individual force level, but as a whole. The hon. Gentleman is right that the NAO published an effective report two years ago, but the Government have claimed since then that they have protected police funding, which has been challenged by police and crime commissioners and the UK Statistics Authority. An independent assessment would be welcome, so I ask the hon. Gentleman to make that request of the NAO.

**Sir Edward Leigh**: Of course I will pass that request to the Comptroller and Auditor General. The hon. Lady is right: although police forces have successfully reduced costs since 2011, the report that I mentioned has recommended that the Home Office works with other bodies to develop better information on the health of police services and early warnings of when a force might fail. Her question is apposite.

### Audit Costs

4. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What comparative assessment he has made of the operating costs of the National Audit Office and auditing bodies in other countries. [902811]

**Sir Edward Leigh**: The NAO is continually looking at how it can save money. The most recent audited financial accounts show that the NAO has reduced its net resource costs by 21% in real terms against its 2010-11 baseline. That is even while taking on a much greater role in local government at the request of Parliament.

**Nigel Mills**: I am grateful for that answer. I have no doubt about the great work that the NAO does as our spending watchdog, but what more can my hon. Friend do to be assured that it is cost-effective itself?

**Sir Edward Leigh**: The commission constantly urges the NAO to make greater steps to reduce its costs. The NAO has been very successful, and it saves many times its own budget in looking at every other Department to ensure that we get good value for money. My hon. Friend makes a fair point that the NAO must lead the way in reducing its own staffing costs.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

*The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—*

### Alcohol Subsidy: Parliamentary Estate

5. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What estimate the Commission has made of the level of financial subsidy on sales of alcohol on the parliamentary estate in each of the last three years. [902813]

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): There is no direct financial subsidy on alcohol sales in the House of Commons. Alcohol is sold in House of Commons bars and some catering venues, and at banqueting and events, achieving a gross profit margin of some 69%. The profit of some £1 million a year helps to offset the total cost of catering.

**Mr Hollobone**: I am pleased to hear that there is no subsidy of alcohol sales on the parliamentary estate. There have been some recent, well-reported incidents of bad behaviour in bars on the estate. What steps are the Commission taking to prevent such incidents?

**Tom Brake**: The hon. Gentleman may be aware of the incident a couple of days ago in the Sports and Social Club, which is run by the House of Lords. An investigation is under way, and the issue is under review for the reasons that he has set out.

### Parliamentary Press Lobby: Diversity

7. **Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): What progress has been made on implementing the recommendation of Professor Childs's "The Good Parliament" review to publish information on the diversity of the members of the parliamentary press lobby to whom passes are issued. [902816]

**Tom Brake**: Professor Childs recommended a target of a representative parliamentary Press Gallery—Lobby journalists—such that neither women nor men should be in receipt of less than 40% of Lobby passes by 2020. As of 6 December, 25.6% of the 246 valid Lobby passes on issue were for women. As a result of my hon. Friend's question, I will seek the best means of publishing those figures on a regular basis.

**Mr Speaker**: They really will have to do better, won't they?

**Jo Swinson**: Diversity matters in our democracy—both in this House and also up there in the Press Gallery, among those who create the lens through which

our politics is viewed. I am glad that the Commission will look to publish diversity data on the journalists covering Parliament, but I encourage it to implement recommendation 4 of “The Good Parliament” review in full by publishing data not only on gender, but on other characteristics; by breaking down the data by media organisation; and by setting clear targets so that, by 2020, men and women each have no fewer than 40% of passes for the journalists’ Lobby on the estate.

**Tom Brake:** My hon. Friend may be aware that currently neither the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion, nor the Commission, has considered the recommendation of “The Good Parliament” report. However, following her question, I will certainly ensure that they do as soon as possible, and I will look specifically at ensuring that the extensive level of detail that she has requested is reflected in future reports.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I think that “The Good Parliament” report will come to be seen as a pivotal and seminal publication in the history of the reform and modernisation of this place. Will the right hon. Gentleman say a bit more about how its recommendations, including those relating to the Press Gallery, are being taken forward, and how the Commission is considering them in the light of other opportunities to renew and restore this place, including in the northern estate?

**Tom Brake:** One of the measures of the importance that is being placed on the report is the emphasis that Mr Speaker and the House of Commons Commission are putting on it. This is clearly something that Members of Parliament are actively tracking. I am therefore confident that both the Commons Reference Group and, indeed, the Commission, will want to ensure that due priority is given to the recommendations of “The Good Parliament” report, and that they are implemented as soon as possible.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Egypt: Attacks on Religious Communities

8. **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to support religious communities in Egypt as a result of the recent attacks against Coptic and Islamic communities in that country. [902817]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman):** The Church supports ecumenical agencies such as Embrace the Middle East. That, in turn, has supported four projects, including for the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services in Cairo, which supports more than 2 million Egyptians in more than 100 rural and urban communities.

**Vicky Ford:** What steps is the Church taking to highlight the importance of a cross-Department approach to tackling the persecution of religious minorities, especially

Christians abroad, not simply because that is the right thing to do, but because it is important for our security at home?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The Church regularly facilitates opportunities for Church representatives to speak to Government Departments. Only this week we facilitated a visit by a bishop from Zimbabwe, who spoke to Foreign Office Ministers. I draw my hon. Friend’s attention to the interesting speech made by the Bishop of Peterborough on 5 December, in which he talked very much about the hidden victims of persecution. I think that she will find comfort in the bishop’s speech with regard to awareness of how this plays at home.

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the many displaced middle east Christians need support to ensure that they have safe environments in which to live and flourish? Hopefully, they will be able, in time, to return to their home communities. Will she join me in commending Open Doors for its global seven-year campaign, “Hope for the Middle East”?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I certainly commend Open Doors. I recommend to Members next Wednesday afternoon’s “Hope for the Middle East” event in the Terrace Pavilion, where Open Doors will be encouraging us all to support the plight of those people.

As that was probably the last question to me before the recess, may I wish everybody a happy Christmas? Let us not forget that Jesus was carried in his mother’s arms all the way to Egypt, fleeing persecution, so while we celebrate, let us also remember those who are forced to flee from persecution.

## ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

*The hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—*

### EU Referendum: Electoral Commission Resources

9. **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): What assessment has been made of the adequacy of resources available to the Electoral Commission to undertake multiple investigations into the EU referendum campaign. [902819]

**Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South): The Electoral Commission has experience of undertaking multiple investigations and is confident that its resourcing for this year is sufficient. Nevertheless, it recognises that its workload in this area has increased. Early in 2018, the commission will be submitting its budget for the next financial year for scrutiny. It is for the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission to agree the estimate before its submission to Parliament.

**Mr Bradshaw:** I hope that the Speaker’s Committee will ensure that the Electoral Commission has all the resources it needs to do this important work. As well as investigating Russian interference, which the Electoral Commission’s chairman, John Holmes, confirmed it was doing yesterday, will my hon. Friend comment on

whether the commission is examining whether there was any collusion between Vote Leave, Leave.EU, Labour Leave, BeLeave, the Democratic Unionist party and Veterans for Britain? Will she also comment on whether the role of the United States hedge fund billionaire, Robert Mercer, is being investigated?

**Bridget Phillipson:** I know that the commission has had useful and positive engagement with my right hon. Friend about these matters. Various investigations are under way, so it will not be possible to comment further, but I can assure him that once any investigations are complete, the commission will decide whether any breaches have occurred and, if so, what further action may be appropriate. The outcome of all investigations will be publicised on the Electoral Commission website in due course.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We now come to the urgent question—

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Is the hon. Lady seeking to come in on this question a bit belatedly?

**Vicky Ford** *indicated assent.*

**Mr Speaker:** I think the hon. Lady has already asked a question in this group, so I am afraid it is not within the rules for her to come in, but I am sure we will hear further from her in the course of the day—possibly on multiple occasions. We will see.

## Israel: US Embassy

10.30 am

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications of President Trump's decision to move the United States embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

**The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt)**: I thank the right hon. Lady for an important and urgent question.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in her statement yesterday,

“We disagree with the US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem and recognise Jerusalem as the Israeli capital before a final status agreement. We believe it is unhelpful in terms of prospects for peace in the region. The British Embassy to Israel is based in Tel Aviv and we have no plans to move it.

Our position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states. In line with relevant Security Council Resolutions, we regard East Jerusalem as part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We share President Trump's desire to bring an end to this conflict. We welcome his commitment”

in his statement

“to a two-state solution negotiated between the parties, and note the importance of his clear acknowledgement that the final status of Jerusalem, including the sovereign boundaries within the city, must be subject to negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

We encourage the US Administration to now bring forward detailed proposals for an Israel-Palestinian settlement.

To have the best chances of success, the peace process must be conducted in an atmosphere free from violence. We call on all parties to work together to maintain calm”

at a crucial time.

**Emily Thornberry**: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question, and I welcome the opening remarks from the Minister of State.

For all of us in this House and beyond who have worked tirelessly for decades in the hope of lasting peace in the middle east, yesterday's decision was an absolute hammer blow to those hopes. There is a reason why, before yesterday, no other country would locate its embassy in Jerusalem and no other major country would recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital: because to do either thing, let alone both at the same time, confers legitimacy on Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem—an occupation with no basis in international law, and a permanent barrier to achieving the political settlement that we all wish for.

The sheer recklessness of that decision needs no debate. Donald Trump is not crying “Fire!” in a crowded theatre; he is deliberately setting fire to the theatre. And then he has the unbelievable cheek to claim that he is doing this to move forward the peace process, when in reality he is setting it back decades.

As usual—as with the Muslim ban, the Paris agreement and the Iran deal—the question for the UK Government is twofold. First, what are they going to do about

this mess? With Donald Trump wilfully deserting America's role as peace broker between Israel and Palestine, how will we work with our other allies to fill that void?

Secondly, when will the Government admit that they have got their strategy with Donald Trump totally wrong? They told us that holding his hand, hugging him close and indulging him with the offer of a state visit was the best way of wielding influence and shaping his policies. But on Jerusalem, as on so many issues before, they have been made to look like fools: weak, ignored and entirely without influence. When will they realise that bending over for a bully only encourages their behaviour? What our country needs, and what the world needs, is a British Government prepared to stand up to him.

**Alistair Burt**: I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments. I agree that a difficult consensus has been broken. She is right that the international consensus around the status of Jerusalem has been one of the things we have all held on to during a period when the ultimate settlement—the final settlement—has yet to be agreed. It has always been seen as part of the process that, at the end of that negotiated settlement, the status of Jerusalem would be confirmed. The United States has taken a decision about itself and about the location of its embassy. In answer to her final point about the United Kingdom's position vis-à-vis President Trump and the United States, we make it clear that we disagree with the decision. The Prime Minister has said that it is unhelpful. It is not a decision we would take.

We have now to decide, as the right hon. Lady said, what we do now. The first thing we have done is to co-sponsor a meeting tomorrow at the UN Security Council when this will be discussed. We have co-sponsored that with our European partners because it provides the opportunity to take stock of where we are and how we can move forward. There are two options: one is that we just dwell on this particular decision of the United States, as people will for a while, and just leave it sitting there; and the other is to decide what we do now. It is imperative that we now see the work that the President's envoys have been doing, which they have shared with a number of partners. That now needs to come forward—more quickly, perhaps, than people anticipated—and then we can see what there is to work on for friends both of Israel and of the Palestinians. The process has to move on. If the process were derailed by this, it would compound the unhelpfulness of the decision. That is what we want to talk about.

The right hon. Lady mentioned our longer-term relationship with the United States, which is very deep: defence, intelligence, security, trade—it covers a multitude of things. It has been in place for centuries and it will go on for centuries, regardless of leadership. We respect an elected President but we know that the relationship with the United States is much deeper, and the United Kingdom will continue to honour that relationship in its many forms.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): If the President has a cunning plan which he has not shared with any of his allies, may I invite my right hon. Friend to speculate on what it might be?

**Alistair Burt**: If there is, this is a decision that has clearly been welcomed by the Israeli Prime Minister and the state of Israel. There is no doubt that Israel sees

[Alistair Burt]

the United States as a great friend. There is no surprise to any of us in relation to that, and nor does it change anything particularly markedly in terms of relationships in the region. Perhaps, when proposals come forward, if concessions are needed by the state of Israel in order to make the agreement that we all wish to see which will be supported by all sides, there just might now be an extra area of pressure that can be applied because a friend of Israel has done what the President has done.

I have no inkling of the thinking of the President of the United States. But, as everything in this whole business is used in one way or another, there are just possibly those within the state of Israel who will recognise the limb that the President has gone out on, and perhaps, when push comes to shove, that might be of some assistance. As for us, we are very clear on our position. We disagree with this and we will continue to work with all partners to seek the peace settlement that is so urgently needed.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): President Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv is not only reckless and wrong but throws the entire peace process into jeopardy. There is no denying that this decision seriously hinders a two-state solution to the conflict. The reaction from the international community has been overwhelming. Pope Francis said, "I cannot remain silent." The UN Secretary-General spoke of his "great anxiety". The European Union has expressed "serious concern". I could go on.

Tomorrow, the UN will meet amid concerns that Mr Trump's announcement is in breach of both international law and UN resolutions. Will the Minister therefore take a moment to condemn this reckless decision in the strongest possible terms and assure the House that all efforts will be made tomorrow at the UN meeting to have the decision reversed?

Regardless of political differences across this Chamber, we share the values of tolerance, inclusion and respect across these islands. Taking that into consideration, will the Minister today completely rule out a state visit from President Trump and send out a clear message that his divisive and reckless actions are not welcome here?

**Alistair Burt:** We will allow the peace process to be derailed by this only if we interpret the decision as doing just that, as opposed to providing a different opportunity to take the peace process forward. The envoys are still working; they are still in contact with Arab states and Arab partners, as well as the state of Israel. As I said, that work should continue with greater urgency. The risks in the region are even clearer this morning than they were yesterday before the President spoke—risks that many colleagues in this House know full well because of our frequent visits to the region. The only way that those risks can be quelled is by demonstrating to those who seek hope for the process that there is still a chance of hope. The United Kingdom must do nothing to cut off that possibility. That is why we have to keep urging the peace process forward. The deficit of trust with the United States because of its decision will be noted, but it will remain an important part of discussions for the future.

On the hon. Gentleman's other two questions, we co-sponsored the meeting with the UN, so it is our intention to work with partners urgently on moving this forward. On the President's visit, again, the Prime Minister has made clear her views on that: an invitation has been extended, but there is no date set for the visit.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): I welcome what the Minister of State has said this morning. I thought I would share with the House a sentence from a letter from the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches in Jerusalem to President Trump:

"peace...cannot be reached without Jerusalem being for all."

That was echoed yesterday by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who said:

"The status quo of the City of Jerusalem is one of the few stable elements of hope for peace".

He urged us all to

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem".

**Alistair Burt:** I think that we would all concur with those words. The status of Jerusalem is of immense importance in the region to all faiths and all parties who live there. It is essential that the consensus that Jerusalem is for all be honoured. As I stated, it is very clear that our position on the final status of Jerusalem, as part of the final settlement to be agreed between the parties, is the most important thing, not anyone's unilateral decision about what they think about Jerusalem.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The UK Government have previously said that they would recognise Palestine when the time was right. Is the time not right now?

**Alistair Burt:** Our view has been that recognition of Palestine should come at the time when that is in the best interests of the prospects for peace and the peace process. That remains our position for now.

**Ms Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel isolates the USA. It has been condemned by European and middle eastern leaders, and even by Pope Francis. All say that this hostile act is ignorant and undermines the delicate peace process. Will the Minister confirm that we robustly maintain, with the States, a position of seeking a two-state solution, although I suggest he begins by pointing out where Jerusalem is to President Trump?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I assure her that there is no change in the United Kingdom's position, either on the final status of Jerusalem, or on the need for a two-state solution.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): Further to the Minister's answer to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who asked, "If not now, when?", the Minister will be aware that one of the most grievous consequences of this decision is the impact on Palestinian public opinion. More and more people are giving up on a two-state solution. With Britain's particular historical

responsibilities, is it not time to honour the overwhelming vote in this House back in 2014 and recognise Palestine as a state?

**Alistair Burt:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I make frequent visits to the region—I was there recently—and yesterday I expressed to the Palestinian representative in London my views on the President of the United States' anticipated speech. Recognition of the state of Palestine is not necessarily a consequence of what we heard yesterday. It is not tit for tat; it is more important than that. Accordingly, it should be a decision made by the United Kingdom at a time when we believe it is in the best interests of the process of peace. That is the view for now.

**Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con):** Can my right hon. Friend confirm that UK aid contributions to the Palestinian Authority are significant in maintaining the stability of the region, as they have historically been, which will ultimately help to drive forward the negotiations on a two-state solution and the peaceful settlement that we wish to see?

**Alistair Burt:** Indeed. I spoke just last week to the Palestinian Authority's Education and Finance Ministers to talk about the latest tranche of support that the United Kingdom is giving to the Palestinian Authority. It is provided in the clear belief and understanding that the Palestinian territories are moving towards statehood. That is the purpose of our support for them, and I re-emphasised that and made it clear. That is where the hope comes from, because there has to be hope for the Palestinians and those living on the west bank and in Gaza. It is our job to make sure that nothing in yesterday's decision by another power makes that more difficult, and that is what we will be working towards.

**Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab):** Does the Minister agree that this is a sea change, not just another setback, because it removes America as an honest broker and changes the facts on the ground so that an independent Palestinian state is not really possible any more? That is the view of senior Palestinians such as Husam Zomlot and Saeb Erekat. What plans do the Government have to move matters forward in their discussions with the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and do they include at least a timetable for recognition?

**Alistair Burt:** I have said what I wanted to say on recognition. Let us talk about the peace process, which the hon. Gentleman started his question with. It appears clear that the position of the United States will have changed materially in the eyes of those working for peace in the region because of yesterday's statement. I would draw attention—rightly, I hope—to the parts of the President's speech dealing with the need for negotiations and a two-state solution, but the nature of the United States as a broker in the region will have been affected. I am sure that we will discuss tomorrow at the UN how the process can be taken forward. The United States will continue to play an important part, but there is no doubt that there is a trust deficit because of yesterday's announcement. It is for other states to fill that gap, to ensure that the prospects for peace are not diminished.

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** Is the reality not that the peace process has been stalled for 24 years, since 1993, and that what we need following this announcement is direct peace talks between the state of Israel and the Palestinian representatives? If we can get from the United Nations a brokered position whereby those peace talks start, this decision could end up having been quite a good one.

**Alistair Burt:** I have no sense that yesterday's decision made a contribution to advancing the peace process. I understand what the President said, and he had a particular logic in doing so, although I am not sure I share it. I do share the view my hon. Friend expressed in his last point—what happens in the region can be either a blow or an opportunity, but usually it is both. We must make sure that the opportunity provided by yesterday's statement is not lost. There is a new role for others to play, but ultimately it must be about what we can do to assist direct negotiations rather than push them back.

**Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD):** Trump's rash desperation to tick off every ill-judged, divisive campaign soundbite now threatens the peace process in one of the most volatile geopolitical regions in the world. The Government have welcomed his words about a two-state solution, but those pronouncements count for little when his actions, coupled with the expansion of Israeli illegal settlements, mean that the prospect of a two-state solution seems more distant than ever. The Government are clearly limited in their ability to influence the US position, but surely it is now time for them to listen to the clear will of this House and for the UK to confirm our commitment to a two-state solution by recognising the state of Palestine, as we do the state of Israel.

**Alistair Burt:** I do not want to repeat what I said earlier, but the United Kingdom's position has a degree of flexibility. The House is right that we have to make a collective judgment about when the time is right in the best interests of peace. The Government then have to make up their own mind about the circumstances and what is right, and they will do that, but colleagues' views are known.

**Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con):** President Trump has said that the United States remains committed to a two-state solution, but will my right hon. Friend confirm that the British Government will be pointing out to this country's strongest ally that moving the American embassy to Jerusalem will be interpreted by many as American acquiescence in Israel's illegal programme of settlement on the west bank, which is itself the biggest impediment to a two-state solution?

**Alistair Burt:** My right hon. Friend provides an analysis of the consequences that is accepted by many.

**Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab):** Is not the reality that President Trump's announcement yesterday has fatally undermined the US's credibility in brokering a peace between Israel and Palestine? In that light, is it not more vital than ever that the UK and the European Union demonstrate—in deed, as well as in word—that respect for international law must be the cornerstone of any lasting peace? Will the Minister tell

[Richard Burden]

the House what action he will take to implement in practice the UK's obligations under the paragraph in UN Security Council resolution 2334, passed just under 12 months ago, that calls on all states

“to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967”?

What, in practice, will Britain do to implement that?

**Alistair Burt:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have followed both UN and EU practice in clearly labelling produce from settlement areas—those areas that have been occupied—and we have also been clear about that in our advice to business. To that extent, we have recognised the importance of following through on resolution 2334, for which the United Kingdom of course voted.

I would say to the hon. Gentleman, as I have said to other Members, that many of these issues have, crucially, to be decided in the final settlement between the parties. There is a greater need for urgency about that this morning than there was yesterday, and it is towards that that the United Kingdom can and will bend its efforts, which is why we are meeting partners tomorrow. I will be in Paris tomorrow for a meeting of the international support group for Lebanon, and we will be talking about this on the margins. There is a need for greater urgency and for making use of this opportunity.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Although we absolutely disagree with the US moving its embassy, will my right hon. Friend reassure me that we will continue to seek, and work with the US to find, a long-term two-state solution?

**Alistair Burt:** I thank my hon. Friend. Yes, the work of the two envoys continues. The United States will obviously continue to play a part in such processes in the region, and I refer to my earlier answers on what we are trying to do to help this process.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I think the Minister understands the perception of yesterday's announcement in the Palestinian community. What can he do to prevent the complete erosion of faith in this process by Palestinians seeking to find a two-state solution and an accommodation on their border with Israel, and would not recognition be such a move?

**Alistair Burt:** The first thing we can do is to make clear our disagreement with the policy of the United States. The second thing is to work with partners to provide an assurance that the peace process will go on and to give people hope. The third thing is to say that the process must be continued with renewed urgency to get the result that we all want. That is the UK's position.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I know the Minister will recognise that our relationship with the United States is far deeper than the question of whoever happens to be the current occupant of the White House, and the same is true of our commitment to the peace process in the middle east. Will he reassure me that we will stick to the original vision in the Balfour declaration of two democratic, prosperous states living side by side, and that we will continue to seek such a solution?

**Alistair Burt:** Yes. We referred earlier this year to the Balfour declaration as “unfinished business”, and that is still our view. Again, yesterday's announcement gives renewed urgency to dealing with the second part of that equation.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your leadership on the 45th President of the United States? Several months ago, you indicated your disinclination for him to address Parliament, and you are being proved more and more right by the day.

When the Minister meets his US counterpart at the UN, will he convey to him the words of the young Palestinian human rights activist—you hosted him at the Amnesty International reception in your rooms yesterday, Mr Speaker—who said that by taking this unilateral decision, the President is flouting international law, international consensus, and the hopes and dreams of all those who harbour a wish for a two-state solution?

**Alistair Burt:** I am sure that the words cited by the hon. Lady will be drawn to the attention of those in the United States. It is our duty to ensure that hopes and promises are not lost in these circumstances.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I completely share the Government's view on this statement by the President of the United States, but I do not believe that it brings the process for a two-state solution to an end. Indeed, I believe it gives greater emphasis to the work that we can carry on to achieve that. Does the Minister agree?

**Alistair Burt:** As I said earlier, the peace process towards a two-state solution will come to an end only when the parties themselves feel that it cannot go any further. It is vital that we and all our partners—including the United States—reaffirm that commitment to the two-state solution, and do our level best to ensure that it is not lost.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Given Trump's previous attitude to settlements, it is clear that this move might embolden further attempts at demolitions and settlement expansion. Is the Minister aware of the real risk that the west bank might be further subdivided? We talk about a two-state solution, but before it is too late, will he please recognise the state of Palestine?

**Alistair Burt:** I hear colleagues' comments on that, and the Government's position is clear: it is better for us to continue our efforts to support legal attempts to prevent demolitions, which we do through our financial support to the Norwegian Refugee Council, and to allow cases to be taken to the Israeli courts. Seventy-nine per cent. of all cases taken forward have resulted in demolitions being stopped, and that is where our effective action is on behalf of those people's rights.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): Although the Minister acknowledges the right of any country to decide where to locate its embassy, I fear that the already fragile prospects for moving the peace process forward are further and significantly diminished by this move. In his welcome reaffirmation of the Government's commitment to a two-state solution, will the Minister continue to devote his not-inconsiderable efforts to driving that forward and delivering an Israel that is

secure within its borders and whose citizens are free from the threat of terrorism, living alongside a viable and truly independent Palestine?

**Alistair Burt:** My hon. Friend knows the region well, and he puts it very clearly—that is the hope of all Members of the House, and it has been for too long. We must now work out how we can move forward from this position with renewed urgency to make it happen.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Unlike any of his predecessors, President Trump has dangerously inflamed every frozen world conflict that he has addressed. Has the time come to see this man as someone who believes in America first, and the rest of the world nowhere? Should we now say that the invitation to him for an informal, or formal, visit is rescinded? People can be invited, and they can be disinvented.

**Alistair Burt:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. An invitation has been given and no date has been set, and that remains the position of the United Kingdom Government.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): This is the second urgent question that you have granted in as many weeks, Mr Speaker, so that Ministers can come to the Dispatch Box and condemn the egregious behaviour of the President of the United States. What is the point of the special relationship if such condemnations have absolutely no effect on the President's behaviour? Can we even say that a special relationship still exists?

**Alistair Burt:** When a decision that we disagree with has been made by our friends, the special relationship gives Ministers the opportunity to explain our position on that to the House and the public, and to maintain that despite some of those decisions, the special relationship that is broad and deep across the piece goes on, even if we disagree with certain political decisions.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): UN Security Council resolution 465 of 1980,

“Determines that all measures taken by Israel to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem... have no legal validity”.

How is Israel complying with that?

**Alistair Burt:** The hon. Lady knows the region well—Israel is not complying with that. That is why we hold that land to be occupied, and why we voted for resolution 2334 that restated elements of what she has just said. What we need now is leadership. Forty years ago, President Sadat came to Israel to make peace—that is one anniversary we have not said much about this year, and it should be remembered. It takes bold leadership by those in the region to make a difference, and perhaps after yesterday, it is now time to see more of that.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Diolch, Mr Speaker. Does the Minister agree that

Jonathan Freedland, writing yesterday in *The Guardian*, summed up President Trump's announcement best when he described it as an act of diplomatic arson?

**Alistair Burt:** It is not the responsibility of Ministers of the Crown to comment on articles by *Guardian* journalists, or any journalist, no matter what their opinions may be. The House will make a judgment, but the important thing for Ministers and Governments to talk about is how to de-escalate tensions and how to recognise positive elements in any situation in order to move forward. The place has enough rhetoric and enough people willing to take to the streets for all sorts of reasons. The United Kingdom will not play a part in that.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): Let us be absolutely clear: this announcement is the latest incidence of the Trump Administration showing contempt for international law and the rest of the world. Let me ask the Minister again. Surely it is right, at the UN Security Council tomorrow, for the UK to commit, as most of the world has, to the long-overdue step of recognising the state of Palestine?

**Alistair Burt:** The United Kingdom will restate tomorrow our determination to see a final settlement with peace between the nations—two viable states—and our determination that the statehood we wish to see in Palestine is agreed. Our position is that we will recognise when it is the right time in relation to peace. We will make that decision.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): It is 12 years since I visited Ma'ale Adumim, a huge settlement just outside Jerusalem that is now home to 41,000 people. Emboldened by Trump's decision, the Israeli Parliament is for the first time introducing a law to annex that settlement. Does the Minister agree that the legitimisation of a settlement built illegally on Palestinian land is a very dangerous move? Will he join me in condemning it?

**Alistair Burt:** The hon. Lady raises again the difficult issue of legality in relation to settlements. There is evidence that the Israeli Government have been influenced by the United States and others in some of their decisions, including legal decisions, in relation to Jerusalem. Our position remains clear: the settlements are illegal and must be dealt with as part of an overall settlement. We support challenges to the legality of the settlements, when it is legitimate and right to do so, by those who might be affected by them or by demolitions. That will remain the policy.

## ROYAL ASSENT

**Mr Speaker:** I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

European Union (Approvals) Act 2017.

## Business of the House

11.2 am

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

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** The business for the week commencing 11 December will include:

MONDAY 11 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

TUESDAY 12 DECEMBER—Continuation in Committee of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill (day 6).

WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER—Continuation in Committee of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill (day 7).

THURSDAY 14 DECEMBER—Debate on a motion on equality of pension provision for women, followed by debate on a motion on hormone pregnancy tests. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 15 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 18 December will include:

MONDAY 18 DECEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill (day 1).

TUESDAY 19 DECEMBER—Continuation in Committee of the Finance Bill (day 2).

WEDNESDAY 20 DECEMBER—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill (day 8).

THURSDAY 21 DECEMBER—General debate on Russian interference in UK politics and society, followed by a general debate on matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 22 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

Today is a day of celebration. I am sure colleagues across the House will join me in congratulating our fellow parliamentarians down under, who have today legalised gay marriage. Australia becomes the 25th country to recognise that marriage is a celebration of all love. It has been wonderful to see such happy and celebratory scenes in its Parliament.

In further good news, today marks the commissioning of the UK's new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth. Her Majesty herself will be the guest of honour at the event, and we hope that it is a huge success.

Let me also wish good luck to the five cities that will find out this evening which of them will be crowned the UK's city of culture. It is a tough choice between Stoke-on-Trent, Swansea, Sunderland, Coventry and Paisley, but I know that the successful city will do the entire country proud.

My final bit of good news concerns the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz). I am sure the whole House will join me in wishing her a very happy birthday. I look forward to our catch-up later, when I have no doubt that we shall have a piece of cake together.

**Valerie Vaz:** Follow that, as they say. I just say that the number has been printed incorrectly: the digits should be reversed for my age. [*Laughter.*]

I thank the Leader of the House for updating us on the business for the next few weeks. It is more or less settled, subject, I suppose, to a few phone calls. Obviously, we were expecting a statement from the Prime Minister earlier this week.

We know the business for 11 January: the debate on restoration and renewal has been fixed. Can the Leader of the House update us on the rest of the business for that week? On the subject of R&R, does she agree that, given the recent legal action by Unite and the GMB, and given that more than £10 million was paid out last year to more than 250 working people who had been denied a job because their names had appeared on a blacklist, we should look carefully at any future bids for contracts to ensure that that illegal activity—which has ruined lives—does not take place again? Is the Leader of the House in a position to publish the motion on R&R before Christmas, so that Members can have a chance to amend it?

May I ask the Leader of the House to correct the record? The Chancellor—I notified him that I would raise this matter today—said in his Budget statement:

“We have heard a lot of talk recently from the Opposition about what they would do to crack down on tax avoidance...but the truth is that they did not.” —[*Official Report*, 22 November 2017; Vol. 631, c. 1054-5.]

He said that he was doing the job that Labour Governments had failed to do. That is totally incorrect. When I asked the House of Commons Library what Labour Governments had done, it supplied a list of the measures in 14 Budgets that Labour had implemented to protect our tax revenues. I will write to the Chancellor and the Leader of the House on the matter. I place that on the record. I will place it on my website as well. It is important to say that tax measures to protect our revenues were introduced. That is important because the deficit is the difference between what the Government spend and what they receive. If they are reducing the tax base and cutting jobs at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, it is hard to know where they will find the money, and that is why there have been cuts in public services and people are living in poverty.

Even as we acknowledge the 75th anniversary of the publication of the Beveridge report, the board of the Government's Social Mobility Commission resigns en masse, including a highly respected Conservative former Secretary of State for Education, who is now in the other place. The board has said that

“the government seems unable to devote the necessary energy and focus to the social mobility agenda”.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's “UK Poverty 2017” report, published a few days later, nearly one in three disabled people are living in poverty, while 30% of children and 16% of pensioners live in relative poverty; that figure has risen by 3% in recent years. When will we have an urgent debate on the state of poverty in the UK, and when will there be new appointments to the board of the Social Mobility Commission?

Let me now turn to the invisible papers, as I call them. I have a few questions: who, what, where and why. We know who, because the motion was very clear: the

Secretary of State had to give the papers to the Exiting the European Union Committee. What is in the papers? In October 2016, they were called assessments; in December 2016, they were sets of analyses. As for the “where”, it is highly bizarre. Members must make an appointment, and must arrive five minutes early. They will then be escorted by a Government official to a room where they can look at the papers. They cannot take mobile phones into the room; they must take notebooks. Presumably they will be given a stubby pencil, or perhaps a pen containing invisible ink. As I say, that is bizarre. We are elected representatives, and we are entitled to see the papers.

Then there is the “why”. If there is nothing in the papers, why are the Government so secretive? But there is a bigger “why”: why have the Government not conducted the impact assessments, given that Brexit is affecting 88% of our economy?

I join the Leader of the House in celebrating gay marriage in Australia, but, more importantly, Sunday is human rights day, and Amnesty International asks us to remember our actions that freed Albert Woodfox, who was held in the USA for over 43 years in solitary confinement, Phyo Phyo Aung in Burma, and Yecenia Armenta Graciano, who was detained and tortured in Mexico. They all said on their release that that was a result of the role played by Amnesty International.

You, Mr Speaker, yesterday launched in Speaker’s House “Write for Rights” with my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), chair of the all-party group on human rights. Amnesty International wants us to write for its Turkey director Idil Eser and chair Taner Kılıç, as well as nine other Turkish human rights defenders.

I know the whole House will join me in thanking the Burgundy town of Avallon, which named one of its streets Rue Jo Cox, and there is a sign that reads “British MP. Killed for her convictions”. We condemn those who support her killer and his group, we stand with those who oppose them and, of course, we salute the silence breakers.

Finally, Mr Speaker, may I congratulate you and Sally on your wedding anniversary?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I was not aware that it was your wedding anniversary, Mr Speaker: congratulations.

I join the hon. Lady in remembering Jo Cox and congratulating that community in France which has recognised her memory and the work she did to promote human rights and cohesive communities. She will never be forgotten, and all hon. Members would want to remember her.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of blacklisting. She will be pleased to know that it has been made clear in all our procurement contracts that none of our suppliers may engage in blacklisting activities, and we have received an assurance on that for the work with the contractor for the restoration of Big Ben and Elizabeth Tower. I share the hon. Lady’s concern about that issue.

The hon. Lady pleads that the Labour Government did a lot to reduce tax avoidance, but the fact is that since 2010 Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs has generated £160 billion in tax revenue from measures to stop avoidance and evasion. That is an extraordinary and strong achievement on which we should congratulate

HMRC and also this Government, because all too often the Opposition talk the talk but do not walk the walk; they simply do not achieve what they promise. Now, under this Government, the top 1% are paying 27% of all taxes, and the top 5% nearly half of all taxes. People who earn more have never been taxed more than under this Government, so progressive taxation is a feature of our Government’s achievements—far more so than when Labour was in office.

The hon. Lady talked about the Social Mobility Commission. She is right to point out that Alan Milburn made a great show and dance of resigning from a job and role that was actually coming to an end. I point out to the hon. Lady the amazing achievement just this week on children’s literacy in our schools in England: England is joint eighth in the world for reading as a result of this Government’s changes to phonics and the amazing dedication of teachers across the country.

As shown by our Green Paper on mental health, Conservative Members are determined to ensure that there is parity of esteem between mental and physical health. Six hundred thousand more disabled people are in work now than in 2010. That is a record of achievement that we on this side of the House are proud of. Of course there are 600,000 fewer children in workless households than in 2010. Those are all things designed to support young people. They are measures that Conservative Members have put in place and have been determined to make progress on.

Finally, the hon. Lady talks about the impact assessments. The Opposition have generated an enormous amount of headlines and publicity over this issue, but the House will be interested to learn that the sum total of 16 Members of this House and the House of Lords have taken the trouble to go and see that analysis that has been made available. Hon. Members should also respect the fact that the freedom of civil servants to discuss matters and give advice freely to Ministers must be upheld. That is why it is important to hold these reports in a confidential and secure way. Those who need to read them or have an interest in reading them can do so, but I say again that only 16 Members across both Houses have availed themselves of that opportunity.

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): We have outlawed forced marriage in this country, but could we have a debate on children of 16 still being able to be married with the consent of their parents, instead of waiting until they are 18? That seems to be an anomaly that we should fix.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises a question that many people have concerns about—namely, the safety of our children until they reach an age at which they can make decisions for themselves. There has been a long-standing law that young people can marry at the age of 16, however, and I think it unlikely that that will be reviewed in the near future.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week, and I join her in sending congratulations to Australia. I wish the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) happy birthday, and I wish you a happy wedding anniversary, Mr Speaker.

[Pete Wishart]

Well, what a week! They do not come much more dramatic than that. Just when we thought that this chaotic Brexit cluelessness could not get any worse, this Government went and surprised us all over again. I am actually now embarrassed that my nation of Scotland is caught up in this total and utter disaster. We did not go looking for any of this, and we certainly did not vote for it, but all of a sudden the institutions of my nation are caught up in the collateral of this disaster. I know that this Government are now totally in thrall to the Democratic Unionist party, and I only hope that the Leader of the House shared the business statement with its Members in advance, just in case she has to hastily redraw it if they do not like it.

The farce around the Brexit analysis papers still goes on, six weeks following the binding vote of this House. These analysis papers simultaneously detail 50 to 60 sectoral impacts while at the same time not existing at all. They are Schrödinger's Brexit analysis papers. What is becoming clear is that there were never any such papers, yet for some reason the Government took it upon themselves to boast about their existence to the point at which the House passed a binding vote to produce papers that did not even exist. If that is not contempt of Parliament, I do not know what is. The Secretary of State really should be considering his position this morning.

We considered the devolution parts of the repeal Bill this week, but everyone noted that the Bill as it is currently constituted—particularly the provisions around clause 11—is not fit for purpose and will deeply damage the devolution settlement. Today, however, those clauses remain in place in the Bill. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Scotland said that he would table amendments on Report, and he will obviously be held to that, but will the Leader of the House ensure that they are tabled early so that the Scottish Government can assess them, to judge whether they are sufficient to deal with the many threats that are being posed to devolution?

Lastly, Mr Speaker, I also congratulate all the cities competing to be the UK city of culture in 2021, but I am sure that you will forgive us if we on these Benches give an extra cheer for the city of Paisley to become the first ever Scottish city of culture for the UK.

**Andrea Leadsom:** We will always understand the hon. Gentleman's desire to support his own local contender—that is absolutely acceptable—but we in the Westminster Parliament congratulate all the cities involved and wish them all luck.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the claim that there has been a contempt of Parliament. I must utterly refute that. The Government have satisfied the motion, providing the House of Commons Exiting the European Union Committee with information covering 58 sectors of the economy. We were always clear that the analysis did not exist in the form that Parliament requested, but the Department for Exiting the European Union has taken time to bring together the analysis that we have in a way that meets the request of Parliament—that is, to provide Parliament with the respect that it is due—and I think, Mr Speaker, that you have now had recognition from the Brexit Committee that it considers that matter closed.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about consultation with the devolved Administrations. It has been made clear that the close consultation with all those Administrations, including Scotland, will continue on all subjects relating to the bright future that we believe lies ahead for the United Kingdom once we leave the European Union.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the nuisance telephone calls that are made randomly by cold-callers? Only yesterday, I was driving along the A13 when a young lady came on the phone—it was hands free—to say that she had heard I had been involved in a road accident, to which I replied, “If I get one more call, I will be involved in a road accident.”

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am pleased that my hon. Friend always drives carefully and that he was using a hands-free device, but he raises an important point of concern for many of our constituents. In the past, the Information Commissioner's Office had to prove that a company was causing substantial damage or distress by its conduct before action could be taken, but the Government have now changed the law to make it much easier for nuisance-call companies to be hit with fines of up to £500,000. That is a welcome step, but my hon. Friend may like to seek a Westminster Hall debate or raise the matter at Digital, Culture, Media and Sport questions to discuss it further with Ministers.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure that the Leader of the House will agree that winter is beginning to bite, and accident and emergency departments up and down the country are struggling to cope with demand. According to a report this morning, a million people are now not being seen within four hours at A&E. The A&E in Huddersfield is threatened with closure, so may we have an early debate on A&E, the shortage of beds, the shortage of doctors and the shortage of common sense in this Government?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Thanks to the hard work and dedication of staff and record levels of funding, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the NHS is more prepared for winter this year than ever before. We know that the NHS is facing increased pressure this winter, which is why it has robust plans in place that are supported by an extra £335 million announced in the Budget on top of the previously announced £100 million to support A&E departments. More than 1,000 extra beds have been freed up nationally since February by reducing delayed transfers of care, and areas continue to work to increase that number to more than 2,000 to 3,000 extra beds over the winter period.

**Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): Will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate on access to NHS dentists in rural areas? Oral health in children is reaching crisis levels, with almost a quarter of five-year-olds suffering from tooth decay—the No. 1 cause of hospital admission for that age group. Selsey in my constituency has a population of 12,000 and growing, but not a single NHS dentist. This matter should be debated to ensure that everyone, irrespective of where they live, can have access to good NHS dental care.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am really sorry to hear of the problems in my hon. Friend's constituency, and she is quite right to raise them. NHS England has a legal duty to commission primary care NHS dental services to meet local needs. Access has improved significantly in recent years, but more needs to be done. I encourage my hon. Friend to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise the specific problems in her constituency.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): May I wish you felicitations for your wedding anniversary, Mr Speaker? Also, I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) is still at the stage where the candles do not cost more than the cake, and I wish her a very happy birthday. [*Laughter.*] There is a very fine line, Mr Speaker.

I ask the Leader of the House for an early indication of availability for Backbench Business Committee time after Christmas. I know that we will be discussing the restoration of the Palace on the first Thursday after Christmas, but I hope that we will get some time on the following Thursday, because the debate on RBS Global Restructuring Group, which was deferred last week, was heavily endorsed, and we are already anticipating applications for debates on really quite important matters.

As for the Brexit sectoral analysis or impact assessments, the north-east of England has a particular set of problems when it comes to the UK economy, and even if there is no sectoral impact assessment for anywhere else, we would like one for the north-east. Our part of the country currently has a balance of payments surplus in manufacturing, and there will be a great deal of concern among businesses in all sectors if nothing has been outlined for our region's future.

**Andrea Leadsom:** As ever, I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's request for more time for Backbench Business Committee debates, and particularly for the important rescheduled debate on RBS Global Restructuring Group. He mentions the impact assessment on issues specific to the north-east, and I am sure he will be reassured that since 2010 unemployment is down 41% in the north-east and 44,000 more children are at good or outstanding schools. Nevertheless, he makes a good point. I assure him that the Government are committed to making a success of leaving the EU for all parts of the United Kingdom.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I indicate to the House—I think there are 34 colleagues seeking to contribute—that we really should finish this set of exchanges by midday, because there is a statement from the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), to follow and, thereafter, two very well subscribed Backbench Business Committee debates. There is a premium on brevity.

If colleagues have prepared what, frankly, is too long a text, please have the consideration for others that would be represented by cutting that text. If you cannot cut it, do not bother with the question. The debates that follow are very important and I have to respect the interests of those who want to contribute to those debates.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I was hoping Sir Desmond was going to help out, because he is always a master of brevity— [*Laughter.*] His questions do not take much time, anyway. They are always very brief. I call Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): Following your guidance, Mr Speaker, I have a simple question. We are going to build more houses in this country, which is welcome. A local estate agent, Greenslade Taylor Hunt, has been caught price fixing. May we have a debate on stopping estate agents from abusing their position when we want to build more houses for young people?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I completely agree that we want to build more houses for all people in this country, and particularly for young people. There are no Communities and Local Government questions until next year, so instead I suggest that my hon. Friend writes to me on that point. I will take it up with him.

**Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Last week I raised with the Leader of the House the possibility of having a debate on the position of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, particularly the three who were sentenced to death because of their beliefs. Now we understand that Captain Muhammad Safdar, the parliamentarian who raised the issues that led, the day after, to the Ahmadis' imprisonment, is about to visit the UK. May we have a debate on what the Government will say to him about the Ahmadis' plight?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Again, the hon. Lady raises an important issue. I am sure she will be in touch with Foreign Office Ministers to reflect her views, and I am sure they will be very happy to respond to her question on what the official line will be when this man visits.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My constituent had a £200,000 offer on his house shortly before phase 2 of High Speed 2 was announced. HS2 Ltd has now valued the house at £185,000. Can I have a statement from the relevant Minister on how HS2 Ltd is instructing these valuations?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising this very important matter, which was of great concern to my constituents and, indeed, yours, Mr Speaker, during the first phase of HS2. I continue to challenge HS2 Ltd on a number of constituents' house purchase matters that have been long outstanding. I urge my hon. Friend to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate to get a further response from Ministers on what more can be done to ensure that HS2 Ltd is addressing all constituents' concerns fairly.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): The Association of Medical Research Charities has now published its report on greater access to off-patent drugs on the frontline, to which many stakeholders have contributed, including me as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on off-patent drugs. May we have a debate on how to continue our cross-party agenda to increase access to off-patent drugs?

**Andrea Leadsom:** All Members have particular constituency issues concerning off-patent drugs, which is an incredibly important area. I see that there are Health questions on 19 December, so the hon. Gentleman

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might want to raise it then. I am sure there would be a lot of demand from Members for a debate on the subject.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I am concerned about the way the Boundary Commission for England is operating its consultation, because 5,957 respondents—96% of all people consulted in Morecambe and Lunesdale—said they wanted to keep Morecambe and Lunesdale intact. Both parties agree that the communities of Lancaster and Morecambe should be kept separate, and since then more than 1,000 more submissions have been put in.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is raising an important point. The Boundary Commissions for England, Scotland and Wales published revised proposals for constituencies on 17 October, and the consultation does not end until 11 December. He is right to raise this issue in this place and to encourage more respondents to come forward before the closure.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Last month, I met my constituents Margaret and Richard in Parliament at an event organised by CRY—Cardiac Risk in the Young. Sadly, the reason they were there is that they lost their son, Tom Hardman, a talented local cricketer who died of sudden cardiac death. May we have a debate in Government time on the work done by CRY and how we might prevent the 600 such deaths every year?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am so sorry to hear about that tragic case; and, as the hon. Lady says, there are too many of them—600 cases a year. It is right to raise these issues in this Chamber and I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate on this.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I received an email this week from two of my constituents whose mother is a former member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and was stationed at Bletchley Park during world war two. She is now being cared for at the Royal British Legion care home, Dunkirk Memorial House, in my constituency. They just wanted to express their immense praise and thanks for the fantastic care their mother and other veterans have received in these homes. Will the Leader of the House therefore join me in praising the staff at Dunkirk House, and will she pass on the message to the Ministry of Defence about how important these Royal British Legion care homes are to our veterans?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in praising the excellent work carried out by the staff at the Royal British Legion's Dunkirk Memorial House in her constituency. All six of the Legion's care homes around the country make an enormous difference to the lives of ex-servicemen and women and their families, and I know that my colleagues in the Defence team recognise that.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): A recent joint police and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency operation in Bradford on uninsured and untaxed vehicles has resulted in 540 untaxed vehicles being identified

and 29 vehicles being seized in one week because their drivers had no insurance. Nationally, figures are rising on this, with the highest tax evasion rate for more than a decade. Will the whole House join me in congratulating West Yorkshire police on their initiative in Operation Steerside to tackle dangerous driving in Bradford? Will the Leader of the House grant parliamentary time to discuss this issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I join the hon. Lady in congratulating her local police force on tackling this; it sounds like an enormous achievement. Again, I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate to raise these specific points and to share best practice in catching this type of evasion.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am hoping that somebody might conceivably manage a single-sentence question. I call Mr Stephen Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Last week, the Royal Bank of Scotland, which is 72%-owned by the taxpayer, announced the closure of 259 branches, including branches in my constituency in Bannockburn, Dunblane and Bridge of Allan, with the loss of 680 jobs. Will the Leader of the House provide a debate, in Government time, on the announcement of these closures and the future of retail banking in this country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is a strong champion for his constituency and he raises an important point. All banks must now comply with the access to banking standard, which requires consultation and careful thought before closures. He will also be aware that the Post Office now provides access to basic banking services for all retail banks. Nevertheless, he raises an important point and I encourage him to pursue it, perhaps with the Financial Conduct Authority or with this bank itself.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): In recent weeks, I have noticed an increase in immigration casework. I have previously written to the Home Office about the effect that delays are having on my constituents. Data published by the Department last week showed that only 62% of MPs' letters and 72% of emails are being responded to within its standard service timescale. May we please have a debate on the modernisation of Home Office correspondence so that Members and their constituents can receive responses in a timely fashion?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises an important point. Many of us have constituency cases related to visa challenges. I know from speaking to the Home Office that often the problem is one of slow responses from overseas countries to inquiries. It is difficult to totally be in control of response times, but she might want to raise her important point at Home Office questions.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): This is an important week in the taxi trade, because the world's first purpose-built electric taxi, made by the London Electric Vehicle Company

in Ansty Park in my constituency, has been certified for use in London. May we have a debate about how investment in electrification can help to meet environmental objectives?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on that achievement in his constituency. It is great news for London and it is certainly great news for Rugby. The Government are fully committed to reducing the carbon footprint of our transport system. This is a great new step that will certainly provide relief for many people living in London.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Research carried out by the Citizen Sense project at Goldsmith's in my constituency shows that pollution in south-east London reached six times the World Health Organisation limit on several occasions during the past year. Can we have a debate on this important public health issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady will no doubt have been delighted to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) mention the first London-certified electric taxi, which was built in his constituency. She raises an issue that matters enormously to all of us. The Government are determined to tackle the problem of air pollution, not only in London but right around the country. We are taking strong steps to encourage and help local authorities to pay for new pollution-free zones. Equally, she should speak to the Mayor of London, who, of course, has the challenge of putting in place measures to reduce the poor air quality in our great city.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Given that we came eighth in an international reading test only this week, can we have a debate about phonics and the underlying teaching of literacy, so that we can make all children great readers?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. That great achievement demonstrates just how far the Government's teaching reforms have taken us. I again praise all teachers for their amazing dedication, and congratulate the children themselves on England delivering its best result since 2001, which was in no small part thanks to our increased emphasis on phonics.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Many Conservative MPs said in this House on Monday that clause 11 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill was deficient and yet they voted for it. At Scottish questions yesterday, the Secretary of State for Scotland said that the purpose of the Committee of the whole House is merely to listen. Can we have an urgent debate on the purpose of the different stages of a Bill as it goes through this House, because I thought that the Committee stage was meant to amend a Bill?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As has been made clear so many times, including by me, we are determined to get the best possible deal for the United Kingdom—and for the EU27—as we leave the EU. An important part of that is listening to all constructive views that seek to amend and improve the proposed legislation. That is what we have been doing and what we will continue to do.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Reports suggest that some 800 British citizens may have gone to fight for the evil death cult Daesh in Iraq and Syria. My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary and, indeed, the Foreign and Commonwealth Minister for Africa, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), have both indicated that those individuals will not be allowed to return to the UK and may be hunted down and killed. Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made before Christmas, because this is clearly a policy matter of great importance to Members across the House?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. I pay tribute to the amazing work of this country's counter-intelligence people, who, as we have heard recently, have thwarted multiple terror efforts in this country. It is important that we continue to support them. We continue to invest in counter-terrorism. My hon. Friend raises the question of what we do to stop terrorists coming back to this country from overseas. It is clearly the case that we need to use every means at our disposal to do so.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Could the Leader of the House do something, or could we have a debate, about the Government publishing routine information? I have been trying for 15 months to get the Library's taskforce dataset published and have had various answers that it will be published in due course or in the near future, whatever that means. If the Government can publish papers that do not exist, surely they can publish papers that do exist so that hon. Members and the public can see them.

**Andrea Leadsom:** If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me about that, I will take it up on his behalf.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): When I visited the excellent Trinity High School in Redditch recently, I had the privilege of speaking to the wonderful young people there. I asked them about their experience of being teenagers in today's world, and they told me about some of the pressures they faced because of social media and other aspects of their lives. Will the Leader of the House join me in welcoming the massive boost to children's and young people's mental health services, and will she work with the Department of Health to make sure that this funding gets to where it is really needed on the ground in Redditch and elsewhere?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is right. Young people face huge challenges, including unique challenges from social media and cyber-bullying. The Government's Green Paper on mental health seeks to alleviate those and to address the problem at its core. It is important to build, in the earliest years, the robust emotional strength that young people can then rely on throughout the rest of their lives.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Leader of the House will have seen that Virgin Care has sued the NHS, and that approach was familiar to me, as the company threatened me when I raised its dubious practices in

[Paula Sherriff]

the House. Will she consider a debate on the matter and make it clear that she will defend our NHS and Members from intimidation by private corporations such as Virgin?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Absolutely. Across the House, we share a commitment to the NHS and to its services being free at the point of delivery. We will always defend the NHS against any external threats, including from private providers. On the other hand, some private provision has been incredibly beneficial to patients and the cost base of the NHS, and we should not overlook that.

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** My constituent recently received a demand for payment of £160 from parking contractors on behalf of his local Lidl supermarket while he shopped there for about 15 minutes. He wrote to the chief executive, who was distinctly uninterested in solving the case. May we have a debate on the abuse of parking charges by certain private companies?

**Andrea Leadsom:** We all share my hon. Friend's frustration about some of the appalling abuses carried out by private parking enforcement organisations. I share his concern, and he should seek an Adjournment debate so that other Members can hear about the situation.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** The British Association of Social Workers advised its members this week that it considered it unethical and degrading to subject a woman to the disclosure of an incident of rape to a third party just to access benefits. It joins a list including the Scottish Government, Unison, the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing. May we have a debate on the growing condemnation of this Government's two-child policy and the rape clause?

**Andrea Leadsom:** We fully recognise that this is a difficult and sensitive issue, but I assure the hon. Lady that the mother will never be questioned about the incident by a member of staff from the Department for Work and Pensions or Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. They will simply take the claim and receive supporting professional third-party evidence. There would not be any requirement for evidence of a criminal conviction or a judicial finding. We have consulted on how the exemption should be implemented, and we have adjusted our approach to make sure that women get the support that they need and that additional financial support goes to those for whom it was intended.

**Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** I am afraid that a steelworkers' pension scandal is brewing. My constituents are worried about making the wrong decision on pension transfers, and the Financial Conduct Authority is providing insufficient support to steelworkers at this crucial time. May we have a ministerial statement and an action plan from the FCA to support steelworkers who are trying to do the right thing for their families?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Pensions are a complex subject, and anybody trying to make decisions needs the right advice. The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue and I encourage him to seek further guidance from the FCA so that he can provide support to his constituents.

**Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab):** When are we going to have a statement on the rights of EU nationals, particularly Irish citizens, many of whom have lived in this country for decades? Even if the Government cannot sort out anything else on EU withdrawal, please may we have a statement on this matter, which is causing anxiety to millions of people?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman seek that reassurance. The Prime Minister has made it very clear on numerous occasions, including in her Florence speech, that all EU citizens will be able to carry on living their lives as before. We have committed to incorporating our agreement on citizens' rights fully into UK law.

**David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP):** Can we have a statement from the Home Office regarding Abubelcir Oncu, a constituent of mine who lost his passport in Turkey? He has indefinite leave to remain, but has been stuck in Turkey for three months, even though he has a replacement passport. His wife is pregnant. Will the Leader of the House please look into this for me?

**Andrea Leadsom:** That is a concerning case. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is already in contact with UK Visas and Immigration. If he wants to write to me, I will be happy to look into the matter on his behalf.

**Mr Speaker:** I say very gently to the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), who is a most perspicacious Member, that the Leader of the House is not, to the best of knowledge, chief executive of, or another worker for, Citizens Advice. Although the hon. Gentleman was allowed to continue with his question, questions should be about the business for next week. Therefore, my little hint to him is that he should seek to get into his inquiry a reference to a request for a statement or a debate. That is very much the correct form for business questions. It is not quite the same thing as asking, "Will you have a look into something for me and let me know?" Nevertheless, we will let the hon. Gentleman off on this occasion, and I give that advice in the friendliest possible spirit.

**Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** May I send the very best wishes from the current city of culture to all those bidding to be the next city of culture?

Radio Humberside this week reported that there has been an upsurge in the use of mopeds to commit antisocial behaviour, and nuisance and criminal offences, in Orchard Park in my constituency. May we have a debate to discuss why this is happening and the practical steps we can take to deal with it, because it is a problem not just in Hull? We want to be on the side of decent people against this kind of yob culture.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think that we all share the hon. Lady's concern. We have seen an extraordinary rise in moped crime, which the Home Office is very concerned about. I am sure that the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee would be delighted to hear from the hon. Lady with a suggestion of a cross-party debate on the matter.

**Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD):** Will the Leader of the House make time available for a debate on why the Government have conducted an

impact assessment into gravity foul sewers and lateral drains, but not into the UK leaving the European Union?

**Kevin Brennan:** Smells!

**Andrea Leadsom:** So we are back to the Government smelling, are we?

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) is being quite deliberately flippant. As he will know, the Government have produced sectoral analysis, which has now been provided in a form that is useful to Parliament in accordance with the requirements of the motion passed by this House. Therefore, the Government have fulfilled the request that was made. I sincerely hope that the right hon. Gentleman is enjoying looking at and learning from that sectoral analysis.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It has now been two years since the Glasgow city deal was announced, yet in recent days we have heard that the Scottish Government agency Transport Scotland is backsliding on its commitment to deliver the flagship Glasgow airport rail link, having sabotaged the project a decade ago. The people of Glasgow are tired of waiting for this project, so will the Leader of the House consider having a debate or a statement on the Glasgow city deal to ensure that it is delivering the world-class infrastructure that is needed for Britain's second city?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am extremely sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's call for further progress. This Government are fully committed to the success of the city deals, including the Glasgow city deal. He might like to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss directly with Ministers what more can be done to make this happen faster.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Increasing the number of live animal exports has been suggested as a way of coping with the expected 80% collapse in meat exports post Brexit. That would increase the number of animals exported on the hoof, rather than on the hook, so will the price of Brexit be paid for in the increased suffering of defenceless, sentient animals?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As a former Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary, I can say to the hon. Gentleman that we are proud to have some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world. It is in fact the EU that prevents the UK from looking at measures to curb further the export of live animals. However, on the movement of live animals, I would gently say to the hon. Gentleman that the issue is not the exports, but the distance that animals have to travel without proper care—food, drink, rest and so on. That is the issue he should be concerned with, not the export or distant travel of those animals. The Government remain absolutely committed to doing everything we can to further improve the welfare of animals as we leave the EU.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Last week, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary reported that the new centralised air support service for police forces in Wales and England was not fit for purpose, with the communities I serve waiting over an

hour for a response. Can we have a Home Office statement on the report so that we can debate the failings of the centralised service, which was introduced by the Prime Minister when she was Home Secretary?

**Andrea Leadsom:** We are always extremely grateful to our police forces for the work that they do. The hon. Gentleman raises a point of which I am not specifically aware, but he might wish to raise it at Home Office questions or through an Adjournment debate so that he can get further information.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): Since 2012, two thirds of Britain's total waste plastic exports have been shipped to China and Hong Kong. From January, that is going to stop—China is going to ban those imports. May we have an urgent statement from the Environment Secretary about where we are going to send our plastic waste in the new year?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sure that the hon. Lady will appreciate that this Government have been totally committed to doing as much as possible to protect our environment, and particularly our marine environment, through our introduction of the blue belt, the protected areas around our coastline, our proposal to ban microbeads in face-cleansing products and so on. This Government have banned the use of plastic bags without a charge, and we have seen a massive improvement in the amount of recycling. We are fully committed to doing all that we can to protect our environment. Should the hon. Lady wish to seek an Adjournment debate on this matter, I am sure that Ministers will be delighted to come along and discuss it with her.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Nepal has passed a new criminal code Bill, which criminalises so-called blasphemy and the conversion of others. There is widespread concern that this code will be used to target religious minorities and will have an impact on religious freedom, human rights and tolerance in Nepal. Would the Leader of the House agree to a ministerial statement on this important issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of religious freedoms and looking after the rights of minorities such as those he mentions, so I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate on that subject.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): May we have the debate on the Royal Bank of Scotland and its treatment of small business customers as soon as possible, and certainly before the Government flog off their shares and avoid accountability?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Gentleman will have been pleased to see that RBS is recovering. He talks about the Government flogging off their shares. The Government intend to return RBS to the private sector and to recoup, as far as possible, the money that the taxpayer had to use to bail it out. That is the right and proper thing to do. He is absolutely right that the debate about the restructuring group was important, and the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, is seeking to reschedule it just as soon as he can.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In among the spin about how powerful the Scottish Tories now are and how they secured the £40 million VAT exemption for police and fire services, I highlighted yesterday that that had actually come at the cost of £265 million per Scottish Tory. If they genuinely did do so much work on the VAT exemption, will the Leader of the House make a statement outlining why the Chancellor was not able to give me in writing the date of one meeting with any one of the 12 Back-Bench Scottish Tories on VAT exemption?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman recognises the amazing work done by my hon. Friends the Scottish Conservatives. I share his enthusiasm for their assiduousness in looking after the interests of their constituents. I am sure he will be delighted, as I am, that in our Budget a couple of weeks ago, the Chancellor was able to confirm a £2 billion consequential budget boost for the Scottish Parliament.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): The Leader of the House will recall that, eight months ago, I informed her that the HSBC bank in Maesteg was closing. Now, NatWest bank is closing in Maesteg and in Pencoed, leaving my whole constituency with one bank. May I press her for an urgent statement from Treasury Ministers about what they can do to address the problem of banks closing across the length and breadth of this country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As I said earlier, there is a new protocol under which banks must undertake to properly consult. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the footfall in bank branches has reduced significantly as people move to mobile banking. However, as we all recognise, in many of our communities there are older people who are perhaps not so mobile phone-savvy and will prefer to use paper banking. Post offices now offer basic banking services for all high street banks, and in many cases that means better opening hours and a better service for constituents. However, the hon. Gentleman

is right to raise the point, and I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate in which he can talk about the specifics in his constituency.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): As we have heard, we will find out later today the winner of the competition to be UK city of culture 2021. Despite starting the process as an outsider, Paisley, after running a great campaign, is now one of the favourites—I am sure that we will do it. May we have a statement on this competition to raise awareness of the winner and our campaign?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Again, I wish all the competitors the best of luck. It is great to see the hon. Gentleman sticking up for his local applicant, and I do wish him every success with it. I am sure that there will be plenty of opportunities for him to raise the issue directly with the Prime Minister, should he be successful.

**Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): On 9 November last year, seven people lost their lives and many more were injured in the Croydon tram crash, which was the largest crash of its kind in 50 years. Today, the Rail Accident Investigation Branch is publishing its findings on the causes of the accident. I have had early sight of them, and it is clear that they will apply across all the tram networks of the UK. For the sake of those who died, many of whom were from New Addington, just on their way to work and never to return again, will the Secretary of State for Transport come to the Chamber to make a statement about how he will ensure that the recommendations of the investigation will be implemented as swiftly as possible so that this never happens again?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Certainly all Members, and I think the whole country, were horrified by what happened: it was an absolute tragedy. We all send our great condolences to the families and friends of all those who died. It is absolutely right, as the hon. Lady says, that we learn the lessons from the report. I will certainly be very happy to discuss what kind of feedback we can get from the Department as soon as possible.

## Social Care

11.57 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** This oral statement is the Government's response to the recent Opposition day debate on social care on Wednesday 25 October. Since that debate, the Government announced further plans for the Green Paper on care and support for older people on 16 November. This oral statement reiterates the substance of that announcement while providing further detail to the House in some specific areas.

An ageing society means that we need to reach a longer-term sustainable settlement for social care. That is why the Government have committed to publishing a Green Paper by summer 2018 setting out their proposals for reform. An inter-ministerial group is overseeing this work. This builds on the additional £2 billion over the next three years that we have already provided to meet social care needs.

In developing the Green Paper, it is right that we take the time needed to debate the many complex issues and listen to the perspectives of experts and care users, building consensus around reforms which can succeed. That is why we are starting a process of initial engagement over the coming months through which the Government will work with experts, stakeholders and users to shape the long-term reforms that will be proposed in the Green Paper. The Government have asked a range of independent experts in this area to provide their views, including the leads of the two most recent reviews on social care, Andrew Dilnot and Kate Barker. We are also engaging closely with key stakeholders, and with people who use services and their carers. The Government will host a number of roundtables to hear a range of perspectives from those representing different constituencies, including carers, service recipients, providers, health services, financial services providers, local government, and working-age adults.

Once the Green Paper is published, it will be subject to a full public consultation. The Government recognise that there is broad agreement across Parliament that reform of social care is a priority, and we look forward to working with parliamentarians to hear a range of views. We have already written to the chairs of relevant all-party parliamentary groups to invite them to meet us to discuss their priorities for and perspectives on reform.

The Prime Minister has been clear that the consultation will include proposals to place a limit on the care costs that individuals face. To allow for fuller engagement and the development of the approach, and so that reforms to the care system and how it is paid for are considered in the round, we will not take forward the previous Government's plans to implement a cap on care costs in 2020. Further details of the Government's plans will be set out after we have consulted on the options. The Green Paper will focus primarily on reform of care for older people, but will consider elements of the adult care system that are common to all recipients of social care.

We are committed to ensuring that people with disabilities and complex conditions can live healthy, independent lives, and participate fully in society. Many of the issues and questions about the sustainability of the care system will be relevant to adults of all ages. To ensure that

issues specific to working-age adults with care needs are considered in their own right, the Government have committed to taking forward a parallel programme of work on working-age social care, which is being led jointly by the Department of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government. This work will be overseen by the inter-ministerial group to ensure close alignment with the Green Paper.

Of course, carers are vital partners in the health and social care system. It would not make any sense to pursue strategic issues related to carers in isolation from the wider work on the future of social care, so they will be a key part of the Green Paper. A sustainable settlement for social care will not be possible without focusing on how our society supports carers. I am committed to making sure that the issues raised with us through the call for evidence on carers in 2016 are central to any proposals for the wider social care system.

Alongside this, we must continue to work to improve the experience of carers today. The Government remain fully committed to supporting carers in providing care as they wish to, and in a way that supports their own health and wellbeing, and their employment and life chances. In the new year, ahead of the Green Paper's publication, the Department of Health will publish an action plan for carers, setting out priorities for a cross-Government programme of work to support them over the next two years.

In the short and medium term, we are taking important steps to ensure we have a stable adult social care sector. We are promoting quality care across the system and supporting the wider networks and services that keep people living independently for longer. It is important to recognise that quality across the adult social care sector remains good overall: the October 2017 state of care report from the Care Quality Commission found that 80% of adult social care settings had been rated good or outstanding. However, it underlined that there are substantial variations in the quality of care depending on where people live. The Department of Health is working with the adult social care sector to implement Quality Matters, a shared commitment to taking action to achieve high-quality, person-centred adult social care. Through our programme of sector-led improvement, we are supporting councils to make savings and improve services by promoting good practice, including new approaches.

Looking beyond social care provision, it is important to highlight the broader support and services that help people to live independently for longer. Well-adapted, specialised housing is becoming increasingly important. The means-tested disabled facilities grant helps with meeting the cost of adapting a property to the needs of a person with a disability or support need. This year's autumn Budget has provided an additional £42 million for the rest of the 2017-18 financial year, taking funding for this year to £473 million.

Getting social care right means a better system that everyone can have confidence in, in which all people understand their responsibilities, can prepare for the future, and know that the care they receive will be to a high standard and help them maintain their independence and wellbeing. This Government want to take the time to consult and build consensus on a long-term, sustainable settlement for the future, which includes looking at the quality of care being delivered, the funding of the system, and how it will be paid for in the round.

12.4 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving me advance sight of her statement, but it is a woefully inadequate response to the Opposition day debate we held in this place on Wednesday 25 October and in no way addresses the motion passed by the House.

That motion called on the Government to note “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”,

and we called on the Government not to proceed with their commitment to those proposals. The Minister has today finally confirmed what many of us on the Opposition Benches suspected: they will not be proceeding with their plans to cap care costs by 2020, as legislated for by the House. This a shameful waste of taxpayers’ money. Over £1 million in today’s money was spent on commissioning the Dilnot review, and it was a waste of parliamentary time enacting the cap. It is no good for her to say that the Government are consulting on the cap. They consulted on this during the general election, and their proposals were rejected by the electorate. Meanwhile, very many people are still faced with the catastrophic costs of paying for their care.

The motion also called on the Government “to remove the threat to withdraw social care funding from, and stop fines on, local authorities for Delayed Transfers of Care”. During the debate, I talked about how Ministers had previously threatened councils with fines and further funding cuts to social care if targets for cutting delayed transfers of care could not be met—fines for targets that half of social services directors believe to be unrealistic. Will the Minister confirm that the Government have listened to the will of the House and will stop these fines, which merely threaten to make the crisis in social care worse?

The motion also called on the Government “to commit to the extra funding needed to close the social care funding gap for 2017 and the remaining years of the 2017 Parliament.”—[*Official Report*, 25 October 2017; Vol. 630, c. 312.] At no point today has the Minister confirmed how the Government intend to enact the will of the House in meeting the funding gap—and of course, shamefully, there was no mention of social care in the recent Budget. Our social care system remains in a perilous state because of the cuts that this Government have chosen to make. The Care Quality Commission has told us that the social care system still remains at a “tipping point”. Will she now confirm that the Government will enact the will of the House and meet the funding gap?

The Minister in her statement addressed the Government’s decision to include the views of carers in the upcoming Green Paper and their failure to respond to the consultation of 6,500 other carers that has already taken place. As I mentioned in the debate, 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. 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.”

Will the Minister give more details on the scope of the carers action plan and reassure those 6,500 carers that their time was not wasted?

The Government announced recently, and the Minister confirmed today, that working-age people with disabilities would be consulted as part of a “parallel” workstream to the Government’s Green Paper consultation. Why a parallel workstream? This is an extremely short-sighted approach to reforming social care, and far from one that looks at the system in the round. Will she give us more details about the parallel workstream for working-age people with disabilities who have social care needs?

It is clear that only a Labour Government can deliver much-needed reform to our social care system. Over the coming months, we will also 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 a new social care levy, an employer care contribution and wealth taxes. These experts will help to clarify our options for funding our planned national care service, and 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 have done under the Conservative party’s earlier dementia tax proposals.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Lady will not be surprised to hear that I did not agree with much of what she said, but I will address some of her points.

Fundamentally, we are setting out, as has long been established, how to get a longer-term, sustainable system for funding our social care. It is absolutely clear from our debates during the past year that, as far as the public are concerned, there is a real lack of understanding about how, at present, the cost of care has to be met by the person who requires it. That is what leads to catastrophic care costs, and the dementia tax that she keeps mentioning, and that is exactly what we are going to tackle by having a cap on the overall cost. In doing so, it is very important to take the public with us and to have a fully informed public debate. It does not matter how far we think we have had such a debate in this place when legislating in the past, because it is quite clear that the public do not understand this. [*Interruption.*] We are only going to get public consent for a long-term solution if we have a public debate that is handled with maturity, and so far we have not seen very much of that.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of carers, and she suggested that carers’ voices are not being heard in this debate. [*Interruption.*] I say to her that they very much are being heard. [*Interruption.*] She can sit there and chunter, or she can listen to the answer to the question. It is entirely up to her, but it is rather a waste of my time in coming to this place if I am just going to be talked over. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I say to the Government Whip that I think I can control the Chamber. I thank him for his help, but I have already told him once that he does not need to worry. [*Interruption.*] Order. The Whip is well aware that he is testing my patience. I do not need any help.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** Carers’ voices very much are being heard, and there is no way we can actually tackle the broad picture of how we fund and manage social care need without properly considering the needs of carers. I am very grateful to the 6,500 people who responded to the call for evidence. We have listened to

them, and we will consider what they have said in bringing forward the Green Paper. In the meantime, it is very important to pull together exactly what support there is at present and then respond to that, and we will publish our action plan in January.

On working-age adults, the hon. Lady is right to some extent in that there are some common issues in the adult social care system that affect both care for the elderly and care for working-age adults, and those common issues will be considered as part of the Green Paper process. At the same time, however, we are going through massive change in how we deal with people with disabilities. We have the very brave ambition of getting more and more people into work and we are on a journey of getting people with learning disabilities out of long-term residential care and into work in the community, and that brings a separate set of challenges. That work will go on in parallel, but the work on the Green Paper will look at the common issues as well as at the specific area of care for the elderly. I hope that gives her some reassurance. We cannot look at this in a silo—*[Interruption.]* She says this should all be looked at together, but care for the elderly and care for working-age adults face very distinct challenges, and I do not think we should diminish either constituency by grouping them all together.

On the funding gap, as the hon. Lady is well aware, we have made £9.25 billion available to local authorities to meet their needs over three years. The reality is that if we are to tackle social care in this country so that everyone gets the care they need as they come to the later part of their life, we need to build a longer-term, sustainable funding system. That is why we are taking forward this debate in the Green Paper, and I hope that everyone with an interest in this subject will get involved in that debate, because we can fix this problem in the long term only if we can take the public with us.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): The House of Lords Select Committee on the Long-term Sustainability of the NHS rapidly concluded that it would be impossible to carry out its task without investigating the interrelated nature of social care, and it changed its remit accordingly. The Committee changed the scope of its inquiry because it recognised that we will not see a long-term, sustainable solution unless we address both. I am afraid that a Green Paper that focuses entirely on social care will fail to rise to the challenge. Has the Minister read the Committee's findings, and as she listens to those she consults at an early stage, will she be prepared, if the advice from them is to consider health and social care together—that has been the advice of all the commissions that have looked at this—to go back to the drawing board and start again by looking at both health and social care?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** To reassure my hon. Friend on the terms of reference for the Green Paper, let me say that part and parcel of getting a long-term, sustainable solution very much involves looking at care, and I pointed out in the statement that we need to look at holistic areas of policy to deliver it. Housing is one area, because if we get housing conditions right, we can obviously enable people to live for longer. The whole purpose of having a Green Paper and a debate is to make sure that we consider this issue not in a silo, but holistically, with a person-centred approach.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of the statement. I very much hope that we will not regularly have an Opposition day debate that is followed, months down the line, by the Government deciding to sneak in a statement on a Thursday morning, but this is perhaps a one-off.

If we are to have a consultation, we should start to look seriously at some of the challenges that we face with an ageing population. The Government currently have their head in the sand when it comes to who will actually look after these people when we restrict freedom of movement. The Government's antics on social care have been far from the strength and stability that was talked about at the beginning the 2017 election campaign.

I very much welcome what has been said today about the cap, but I want to press the Minister about a point on which there is cross-party consensus in Scotland; in particular, it has the support of the Conservative party. In Scotland, the Scottish Government are extending free personal care to under-65s—under the so-called Frank's law—on which her colleague Miles Briggs MSP has been working very hard. That will benefit about 9,000 people, but the UK Government have no intention of bringing in such a policy. Will she agree to meet me and colleagues from Scotland to look at this on a cross-party basis?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The whole purpose of a Green Paper is to allow us properly to debate and challenge all options available. I am interested in what has happened in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman says that personal care is met by the Government there, but the lion's share of costs for the elderly is of course the residential component, which is not met by the Scottish Government. We need to make sure that we are learning from the experience of everybody not only in these four nations, but across the world.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I appreciate the importance the Government attach to adult social care, but the title of this statement is "Social Care" and, as the Minister knows, I have a strong interest in children's social care. At a time when the number of children coming into care continues to rise, the thresholds for intervention are rising and preventive work is I fear going south. As the number of adoptions has also diminished, will she and the Government reassure me that they attach the same importance to dealing with the challenges faced by children's social care services up and down the country at the current time?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. If I may, I will suggest to my hon. Friends in the Department for Education that they respond to him on those points.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I say how nice it is to see my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) back in her rightful place on the Front Bench? I endorse what the Chair of the Health Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), has said to the Minister. Does the Minister regret that the Chancellor failed to mention social care at all in the Budget?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I think we are in danger of getting into a false debate. When I talk about social care, I do

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not talk about it to the exclusion of health but automatically include it. When people talk about the failure of the Chancellor to mention social care, the reality is that more money was made available to the NHS, which will benefit the social care system.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): In the absence of any provision I may make—Dilnot might have encouraged me to make such provision—is it reasonable for me to expect my social care costs to be paid for by the state while my heirs inherit my substantial housing assets?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** In a nutshell, my right hon. Friend has neatly summarised one of the debates we need to have in this area, which is how we can ensure that people obtain care when they need it and have it paid for, while at the same time achieving intergenerational fairness. I hope he engages fully in the debate on the Green Paper when it comes out. That is exactly that kind of thing we need to discuss to inform the public about the challenges and encourage everyone to think about how to plan for their long-term care needs.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The leader of Rochdale Borough Council says that he needs about £20 million to meet growing demands on the adult care service. Given that social care was not mentioned in the Budget, will the Minister give the leader of my council some advice about where to find that £20 million?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** As the hon. Lady knows, we have made an additional £9.25 billion available to local authorities, and they are now able to raise more through the social care precept. Some local authorities are very creative and imaginative in how they tackle that need, and we have increased the money available through the disabled facilities grant. That is taking a lot of demand out of the system, not least because it enables people to live independently at home without the need for care support, because of the extent to which it reduces falls. I encourage the hon. Lady to look not just at money, but at what else local authorities can do better.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I welcome the report and the focus on carers and the elderly—that is really important in Somerset. Let us not forget that four out of five social care institutions already offer good and outstanding service. As the Minister said, this is not just about funding; it is also about other measures that can be introduced to help. For example, hospitals such as Musgrove Park in my constituency link up with social care providers. It is doing a great job, and its end-of-life care has recently been rated outstanding.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I thank my hon. Friend for that point because although, quite rightly, we focus on the challenges and difficulties of this issue, a hell of a lot is going right. As she says, the Care Quality Commission found in its recent “State of Care” report that 80% of institutions were good or outstanding. That is a pretty good deal for a sector that is constantly and publicly criticised.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome the Green Paper, and I hope that we can build cross-party

consensus for the long term. However, any change will be years away from that Green Paper. The problems are here and now for local councils, and the Minister simply did not deal with them in her statement. The Local Government Association estimates for next year a funding gap of £2.6 billion on a cross-party basis. The Competition and Markets Authority states that care homes are failing because local authorities do not have the necessary resources to pay the fees. What will the Minister do about that? Where is the money to ensure that an inadequate social care system does not get even worse next year?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I welcome part of the hon. Gentleman’s comments. He is right: one reason we are at this stage is that the absence of long-term security means that some of these issues are crystallising rather more quickly than they ought to. We have made more money available to local authorities, but clearly they, more than any others, are desperate for a solution. It is incumbent on us all to hold a constructive discussion about the solutions to this issue. I am well aware of the challenges. The hon. Gentleman highlighted the CMA report, and it contains a lot that, frankly, did not surprise me. In the new year we will be bringing forward a response that deals with some of the issues raised.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for her statement, and I encourage her—as others have done—to engage with the whole House on an issue that so many Members care deeply about. As the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) said, it is important to recognise the crises that exist now in certain areas of the country. We must engage for the long-term on a cross-party basis, but also on the crises now, including in my county of Staffordshire.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I do not disagree with much of what my hon. Friend says. Colleagues are talking about a crisis, but local authorities and the care sector have been put under a lot of pressure this year getting ready for winter, and they have stepped up to the plate. I pay tribute to everybody who works in that sector. They work incredibly hard and with real care. The work they do is not putting us in crisis but delivering great care outcomes for many people.

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): This is a shocking statement for thousands of families who live in this country with the misery of social care. The Minister referred to the previous Government, but the 2015 Conservative party manifesto was clear about what it was seeking to do, and about introducing a cap on care costs in 2016. A few weeks into office, the Government changed that, and moved the cap forward until 2020. I have written to the Minister about her exchanges in the House on 25 October with the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), during which she inadvertently misled Parliament about the 2020 date and legislation—that was subsequently changed when I went to the Library. The key issue is that this issue is causing silent misery for thousands of people now. I am 53. Will my children be suffering the same level of misery about my care costs in the next 30 years? When will we see the actual date published?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I think we made it clear in the recent general election that we will be revisiting this

issue. The hon. Lady wants certainty about how we fund the care system in future, and on what obligations individuals and their families will or will not have. It is therefore important to have that full public debate, and work together to bring forward proposals that will put our long-term care system on a sustainable footing. In the absence of that we will not achieve any resolution, and that is contributing to misery for people who do not currently have a limit on their overall care costs. That is what we are trying to address through this process. *[Interruption.]* I hear noise from Labour Members about needing cross-party consensus, then I look at the behaviour of those on the Front Bench—lacking.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the Minister's pledge to consult more widely about a long-term solution, given the pressures on Torbay due to this issue. One problem is people's complete lack of understanding about how the current system works with unlimited liability. If we just put in a blunt cap, that will mean little to someone who has worked for their whole life and bought a house in Torbay, yet quite a lot to someone who has a multi-million pound pile in the south-east. We must look carefully at how we do this on a long-term basis.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** My hon. Friend encapsulates the problem in a nutshell. Many people do not understand that care must be paid for by the individual; nobody understands that they have to pay for it for as long as they have to pay for it. That is why we cannot simply implement the previous proposals because people do not understand them. If we are to expect people who are living longer to fund that care, we must take them with us. That is why we need a fully informed public debate, which is what the Green Paper is designed to achieve. I implore all hon. Members to engage with that and to help to inform the public about exactly what our care system is now, and how it can be improved for their long-term security and that of the country.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): After years of confusion for which the Government bear some responsibility, tens of thousands of carers engaged in sleep-ins will at last receive justice on the national minimum wage. However, the costs are formidable to the providers, and thousands—potentially tens of thousands—of individuals on individual care packages could face bankruptcy. Why was there no reference to that immediate and looming crisis, and when will the Government act to avoid what would be a catastrophe for the care sector?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I know that the hon. Gentleman cares deeply about this issue and he has rightly raised it with me before. I reassure him that the Government are now acting, and we are in close contact with providers to address those issues. It is important to ensure that employers uphold their obligations under minimum wage legislation, and we must not put at risk anybody who is dependent on long-term care—I am satisfied that no one is at risk. We are working in detail with providers to ensure that we get them through this.

**Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): West Sussex has some specific social care issues currently under investigation, and it would be inappropriate for the Minister to comment on those at present. However, I warmly welcome the

expert panel. Will the Minister please ensure that it is fully acquainted with the lessons learned on financing from previous scandals, such as that at Orchid View in my constituency?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** Absolutely. My hon. Friend mentions the expert panel, and it is important that we take the advice of those who have front-end experience of the sector. As he says, this is not just about money; it is about quality and getting the right blend of packages of support and help. We really need to think about achieving the best possible care for individuals, as well as how that care is paid for.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): A recent Barnardo's report showed that two thirds of child carers start caring in primary school, some as young as four, with long-term damage to their mental and emotional health. Will the Minister ensure that one of the Government's primary responsibilities is to tackle the issue of child carers and take them out of a responsibility that we really should not be placing upon them?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I thank the hon. Lady for those comments. She highlights what is literally the Cinderella in this debate. It is appalling that so many children are acting as carers, stoically and fantastically but, as she says, to their long-term detriment. As a society, we would be failing if we did not do more to support them.

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The fact that we need to tackle the challenge of social care has cross-party support and agreement. It was in the manifestos of both main parties. In fact, the Labour party's manifesto said that it wanted to implement change through "consensus" and that the issue transcended party politics. Would the Minister welcome a cross-party approach, rather than political point scoring?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I am very keen to approach this matter through consensus. To be frank, I do not think that we can deliver change without consensus. We have written to all-party groups in the first instance to engage with them. Over the course of the next six months, I hope to engage in conversations and discussions with Members from all parts of the House.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Of course, there is a short-term series of pressures. The Minister has cited the CQC's state of social care report, which talks about decreasing numbers of beds in nursing homes and contracts being handed back to local authorities because of the acute financial pressure. She has also recognised that there is a longer-term issue that all Members have alluded to—the need to set aside some of the yah-boo party politicking and find a cross-party way forward. The hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) wrote to the Prime Minister saying, "Let's have a convention across all the parties on social care reform." Please will the Minister talk again to the Prime Minister? Let us do that, because it is the only way that we will really crack through this problem.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I welcome the spirit in which the hon. Gentleman makes his comments. It is fair to say

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

that we are hearing exactly the same sort of plea from local authorities, which are at the front end of dealing with this problem. He is absolutely right that we need to separate the short-term pressures from the long term, and we ought to be able to have a more sensible conversation on the long-term pressures. Yes, let us save the politics for the short term and have consensus for the long term.

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): I appreciate the opportunity to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I missed the beginning of the Minister's statement—my apologies. I concur totally with what a number of colleagues have said about the issues in the here and now. At the minute, there are significant issues for a lot of councils and a lot of care homes that cannot wait for a few years. The here and now must therefore be the priority.

I have two points to make on that. The first is negative and I would like the Minister to take it back to the Chancellor. I call on the Government to make a public commitment to fund the back-pay bill for sleep-in carers. I do not know how many colleagues know about this issue, but if it is not sorted very soon, a number of very reputable charities and organisations are likely to go bust. On a positive note, I wonder whether the Minister has read the recent *BMJ* report that indicated how exercise can be a significant miracle cure for older people. May I meet the Minister to share the report with her?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman; I am always looking for solutions. He is absolutely right that if we can look after our own wellbeing—both physical and mental—more effectively, the need for care will diminish. That is another reason why we need to have this public debate. Like the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), the hon. Gentleman has mentioned sleep-ins. It is a big issue, but we are working closely with the sector to make sure that we can address it.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): I am currently caring for my 80-year-old mum who has dementia and lives on her own many hundreds of miles away from me. I pay tribute to the fantastic support she receives from the Cumbria services—it is excellent and it reassures me, when I am standing here, that she is being looked after.

My experience of door-knocking during the election demonstrated strongly that the public do not understand

this issue. Dementia patients in particular are not able to understand how care can be funded. When I spoke to people from the Alzheimer's Society in Redditch, they welcomed the focus in our manifesto on this difficult issue. Will the Minister also comment on the fact that countries across the world face a similar challenge? This is really not about who is in power or in government; it is a feature of ageing societies. That is why we must look at it in the round.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** My hon. Friend is right. I mentioned that local authorities are very keen for us to find a solution to this problem, but it is the Alzheimer's lobby that is keener than anyone. At the moment, one in 10 people faces long-term care bills. Therefore, if we are looking at an individual's risk, making financial provision is not necessarily something that they will do, so we do need a solution. The one in 10 people who face long-term care costs generally do face them as a consequence of dementia and the costs are very significant. That is exactly what we are trying to tackle by introducing a cap on the overall costs. That is why it is important that we all get involved and why the Alzheimer's lobby is so keen that we establish cross-party consensus.

My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. The fact is that over the past 50 years, our lifestyles have changed significantly. Looking at my family, everybody lives within half a mile of each other, so as we get older it is very easy for the family to pick up caring responsibilities and share them about. I live 300 miles away from them. That is increasingly the pattern. Like her, when I knocked on doors during the election, I saw people in their late 80s whose families were living many miles away. That is something that we have failed to address over decades, and we need to address it now.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will the Minister update us on the financial stability of the Four Seasons group, which cares for over 17,000 vulnerable residents across the UK?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I am aware that there has been considerable press reporting on what is happening with Four Seasons. What I can say is that since Southern Cross, the CQC has been involved in market oversight and in stress testing exactly what is happening. We are satisfied that there is no risk to any of the people who currently experience care through Four Seasons. Beyond that, I cannot say very much because there are obviously commercial issues. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to raise the matter and I hope I can reassure him that the CQC is very close to what is happening there.

## Point of Order

12.36 pm

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. On 13 September, this House unanimously passed a motion to revoke the Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2016 and the Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations 2016, which imposed the Government's latest hike in tuition fees. The Government have refused to give effect to the will of the House, but the Leader of the House promised under her new convention that we would get a statement within 12 weeks.

Late yesterday—the final day of the 12 weeks—we got a written statement. It added almost nothing new and left us none the wiser on the Government's promised review of higher education funding. It did, however, confirm that the Government will continue to ignore the clear will of this House and our conventions that allow Parliament a say on secondary legislation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, will you tell us your understanding of the so-called Leadsom convention? A written statement makes it near impossible to question Ministers. Has the Leader of the House given you any indication of when Ministers should or will respond through oral, rather than written, statements to votes of the House? Can you give any guidance on how the House can now have a say on secondary legislation?

The Government are riding roughshod over the democratic will of this House. How can we ensure that this House is respected? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I think we have heard enough today, have we not? Thank you.

I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of the point of order. She asked quite a few things. The first point is that I have been given no such notice by Ministers.

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation made a detailed written statement on the matter yesterday, as the hon. Lady said, following the understanding of the Leader of the House of 26 October. If the hon. Lady finds that unsatisfactory, which obviously she does, there are various avenues open to her, the most immediate of which is Education questions on Monday. I am sure it is already apparent to her that that is a good place to start.

On the operation of the Leader of the House's new convention, as a senior Front Bencher, the hon. Lady may wish to pursue the matter through the usual channels. I hope that the usual channels will be open to trying to ensure that she gets the answer. If not—I know that she is not a shy, retiring northerner like myself—I am sure that she could go directly to having a meeting with the Leader of the House to take the matter forward.

## Backbench Business

### Prison Reform and Safety

*[Relevant Documents: Sixth Report of the Justice Committee, Session 2015–16, Prison Safety, HC 625; and the Government Response, Session 2016–17, HC 647; oral evidence taken before the Justice Committee on 18 October 2017, on Work of the Parole Board, HC 415; on 25 October 2017, on Work of the Ministry of Justice, HC 418; and on 7 November 2017, on Young adults in the criminal justice system and youth custodial estate, HC 419; and seventh report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Session 2016-17, Mental health and deaths in prison: Interim report, HC 893.]*

12.39 pm

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the Justice Committee's Twelfth and Fourteenth Reports of Session 2016-17, on Prison reform and the Government Responses to them; notes with concern the continuing crisis in prisons in England and Wales, with an historically high prison population and unacceptably high levels of violence, drug availability and use, disturbances and self-harm and self-inflicted deaths in the adult and youth custodial estate; further notes the critical reports by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons on individual establishments and thematic issues; welcomes the Government's intention to proceed with a programme of prison reform and to produce a prison safety and reform action plan as recommended by the Committee, and the publication of performance data on each prison from 26 October 2017; regrets the fact that the Government does not intend to bring forward legislation to establish a statutory purpose for prisons, enhance the powers of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, and place the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) and the UK's National Preventive Mechanism on a statutory basis; further regrets the Government's rejection of the Committee's recommendation that it should report at six-monthly intervals on the impact of governor empowerment on complaints made to the PPO and Independent Monitoring Boards; and calls on the Government to ensure that information on prison performance and safety is published regularly, and with sufficient detail and timeliness to enable the effective scrutiny of the management of prisons by the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service.

Let me begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for giving us the opportunity to debate this very important topic. I thank the co-sponsor of the motion, the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), and other members of the Justice Committee from both sides of the House who have contributed to our work over the last two years or more, both in this Parliament and in the previous one. I thank the many organisations involved in prison reform and other prison issues that have assisted us with their advice and experience. I also thank officials in Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, and many prison officers across the country, for their co-operation. They all deserve our thanks.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Robert Neill:** I will, but I hope that the hon. Lady will bear in mind that I should like to make a bit of progress.

**Mrs Moon:** Did the hon. Gentleman visit Parc prison during the Committee's investigation? Its fantastic work with Invisible Walls Wales is making a huge difference

[Mrs Moon]

to people's attitudes to prison, as it shows that prison can change the lives of prisoners and their families, and prevent reoffending.

**Robert Neill:** We regularly visit a number of prisons. We are indeed aware of the very good work done at Parc, and we will continue our visits.

Let me explain why we tabled the motion and did so in these terms. We cannot avoid the reality that our prison system has reached a stage at which we have to use the phrase "a crisis". I do not do so lightly. More than 30 years' experience of practising criminal law and visiting prisons to advise prisoners, and subsequently, since coming to the House, working with the criminal justice sector, have led me inevitably to the conclusion that the system is under unprecedented strain.

I do not for one second doubt the good intentions of the Minister or his predecessors, the Secretary of State or his predecessors, or the management of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. I also acknowledge the good work that we see carried out by many individual members of that service as we travel around the country. However, the fact is that despite the extra money that has been invested in the system over the past year or so following one of our reports, and despite all that good work, all the indicators were going in the wrong direction at the time of our two reports—one on prison safety and one on governor empowerment and reform, which were produced in the 2015-16 and 2016-17 Sessions respectively—and they are still going in the wrong direction.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman—

**Robert Neill:** I fear not.

**Hon. Members:** Not yet!

**Norman Lamb:** Not yet, although the hon. Gentleman clearly deserves it. I am grateful to him for giving way.

I agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman is making, but is not the truth that we simply incarcerate too many people, particularly people with mental health problems? A staggering percentage of people in Britain have mental health problems, learning disabilities or autism. Should we not be investing more in keeping people out of prison and ensuring that they receive the treatment that they need to help them to avoid the criminal justice system in the longer run?

**Robert Neill:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point—I agree with him. Although the two reports that gave rise to the debate do not touch on this directly, he may be pleased to know that our Committee has agreed to embark on an inquiry in which we shall examine projections for the prison population up to 2025. The issue that he raises will prove to be a particularly important aspect of that inquiry.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that literacy levels among prisoners are a problem? I understand that more than 30% of people in prison have the reading age of an 11-year-old. Does not that issue really need to be addressed?

**Robert Neill:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The former Justice Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), rightly drew attention to that on a number of occasions. If we do not turn our prisons into places of education, we will be failing, and we will continue to see reoffending. Part of the problem is the low attainment of people when they arrive in prisons, which is often linked with issues such as social deprivation, a lack of proper parenting and unstable family backgrounds. A particularly high percentage of prisoners have been in care. Low educational attainment is a real problem, and it needs to be tackled.

One of the problems that we have found is that because of other pressures on the system, many establishments are running regimes that are so restricted that it is virtually impossible for prisoners—even those who are well motivated and wish to do so—to gain access to some of the educational facilities that ought to be available. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend (Sir Greg Knight) for that important point.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that prison can offer people a second chance to gain access to education and to find the right track? Charities such as Greener Growth, which works in Norfolk prisons in particular, and with which I work in my constituency, help people to understand and connect with the environment, and to learn about food and nutrition, as well as many of the other basics in life that most of us take for granted.

**Robert Neill:** That is absolutely true. I and the Committee recognise the very good work that is being done. What we must do, however, is to ensure that we have a programme of prison reform that genuinely enables us to draw that good work together, and establishes a comprehensive and holistic strategy. For example, the good that is done by many people on existing programmes ought to be reinforced by a more imaginative use of release on temporary licence, but sadly there has been a decrease of some 40% in the use of such release over the last couple of decades. That is one of the indicators that are going in the wrong direction.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): If we could engage many more outside bodies—local authorities and experts on health and education, for instance, and indeed experts on the environment such as the Wildlife Trust, all of which run many good programmes on rehabilitation—we could not only save money by setting up the right framework, but benefit offenders, as the courses would give them skills and make them feel confident about going into the outside world.

**Robert Neill:** My hon. Friend is right. I cannot do better than quote a 19th-century prison reformer, Thomas Mott Osborne, a former politician who is described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath as having "turned to good works". That might seem to be a tautology. Osborne became immersed in the prison system, becoming a prison reform commissioner in New York just before the first world war. He said:

"Not until we think of our prisons as in reality educational institutions shall we come within sight of a successful system; and by a successful system I mean, one that not only ensures a quiet,

orderly, well-behaved prison but has genuine life in it— one that restores to society the largest number of intelligent, forceful, honest citizens.”

He was right then, and I think that what he said rings true now as well.

**Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con):** I was recently very glad to speak to a group of sixth-formers who were doing modern studies. They asked me about prisons, and I said that at the first opportunity I would raise the subject on the Floor of the House and ask one of their questions. Given that my hon. Friend is so well versed in the subject, I will ask him this question: “Do you think that the support on offer to those prisoners who suffer mental health disorders is effective?”

**Robert Neill:** All the evidence that our Committee has seen so far suggests that it is not effective. Far too many people in prison suffer from mental health difficulties. David Cameron, the former Prime Minister, rightly emphasised that in a speech that he made back in 2015.

**Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con):** In February.

**Robert Neill:** My hon. Friend clearly remembers it vividly.

The point was well made. There are some people whom we will always have to imprison, because they deserve to go to prison, and I saw enough of them during my career as a barrister practising criminal law. However, many others are in prison due to far more complex reasons, such as bad choices, lack of support, lack of background, poor education and mental health issues. We need to be much more discerning, and that means that we need a much more sophisticated approach to our penal policy. We need to introduce genuinely robust alternatives to custody, in the right cases, for those who do not pose a threat and a danger to the public, and who can be reformed without their going to prison. That is critical. We have not yet achieved that. The objective must be not only that the public have confidence in sentences, but that we have proper systems for the rehabilitation of those who are incarcerated. However, as almost everyone will be released at some point, we must make sure we release them in a better state in which they can contribute to society than at present.

**Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab):** The hon. Gentleman rightly emphasises the importance of education and rehabilitation, but may I add to that the critical aspect of access to family? May I also commend to him the report on mental health in prisons by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and the work that we did in particular to look at the risks to young people and offenders with mental health problems? Such people were not always guaranteed access to family support at critical times when they were self-harming or at risk of suicide?

**Robert Neill:** That is a good point. I know that other Members are likely to take up such issues in our debate.

While we welcome a number of the initiatives the Government have implemented, more still needs to be done. We particularly regret the loss of the prison element of the Prisons and Courts Bill from the last Parliament, because implementing that statutory purpose,

which would have covered rehabilitation for prisoners, would have been an important umbrella under which to link the good work that is done. It is good news that we have a proper prison reform and safety plan, but it needs to be put into a full context. We need positive actions, not just the good aspirations that are set out.

It is essential that there is a genuinely independent and robust inspectorate, so it is regrettable that we have so far lost the opportunity to place on a statutory basis not just the chief inspector of prisons, but the whole inspectorate as an institution, and to strengthen the requirement for his recommendations to be complied with. It is scandalous that at present only a minority of his recommendations in some cases are taken up. That needs to change. It is also regrettable that the prisons and probation ombudsman has not yet been placed on a statutory basis. I hope we will find a legislative opportunity to do so. I believe that that is what the Minister wants to do, but we must not lose it from the agenda.

Our present indicators on safety in relation to self-harm, suicides, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and assaults on staff continue to go in the wrong direction. More prison officers have been put in, but we must look in the round, too, at how many people we are sending to prison and why, and what sort of regimes are in place.

We have heard reference to an action plan on prison safety and reform, and what we hope to see are specific strategies on employment, mental health, women in prison, and the retention and recruitment of officers, because keeping experienced officers is particularly important. We need a proper robust inspection mechanism under which the inspectorate, which includes excellent people, has genuine teeth to do what is necessary. We also need more transparency, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) will talk about transparency and data.

It is not acceptable that of the 29 local prisons and training prisons inspected this year, 21 were judged to be poor or not sufficiently good. I know that the Minister agrees that we have to turn that around, but all too often I have found a culture of defensiveness among some of the senior management in Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. We must use the changes that have been made to the structure of the service to refresh that culture at every level. That is a most pressing matter. Great work is done further down, but all too often prison officers and governors have said to us that they feel cut out from what can still be too hierarchical a chain of command. That needs to change.

Prison reform was rightly described by David Cameron as a “great progressive cause”, and so it should be, for politicians on both sides of the political divide. Let me end with this thought. A former Home Secretary who became Prime Minister said that one of the purposes of prison was to seek the treasure in the heart of every man. That was said by Winston Churchill in 1910. I say to the current Prime Minister that, as she has had the same career trajectory, such a phrase would fit very well with her desire to tackle burning injustices in society. Some of the injustices and challenges are as acute in our prisons as anywhere else. This is a great cause, and we hope that we will have some more specific responses from the Minister to our reports, and a further indication of the direction of travel. Above all, I hope the House will not let this issue slide down the agenda.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I should say that there is a time limit on speeches of five minutes.

12.55 pm

**David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** Starting from now, Mr Deputy Speaker.

This is a particularly hard-hitting motion; it does not draw back from the challenges the Prison Service faces. It is important that today Select Committee members focus on specific issues and ask the Minister for the Government's response to the major challenges, and we will do that. As the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), the very good Chair of the Justice Committee, said, the situation is deteriorating; the problems in prisons are getting worse.

While staff are doing an excellent job and trying their best in difficult circumstances, there have been 300 deaths in prison custody in the past 12 months, of which 77 were self-inflicted deaths. Self-harm has reached a record high and increased by 12% over that period, and the number of incidents requiring hospital attendance rose by 9%. Meanwhile, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults have risen to record highs, and the numbers of assaults on staff and of hospital admissions continue to rise, so there is a real challenge in the system.

I contend that there is a challenge because of reductions in resources and staff numbers, but there is also a challenge because of an increase in the amount of psychoactive substances and drugs getting into prison. It is a difficult job and a challenge to tackle, but if we do not get the basics right in our prison system, the aims of reform, rehabilitation and turning positive individuals back into society will be hampered.

**Norman Lamb:** Over the past year, people in prison have taken their own lives at the rate of one every three days. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the prison services should set a zero-suicide ambition, that we should be seeking to save every life and that it is intolerable that so many people are losing their lives in the prison system?

**David Hanson:** Absolutely. The threat assessment and self-harm assessment are extremely important, but this requires staffing, so a watch can be kept on individuals and they can be supported through what are often challenging mental health problems, particularly in the first few days and weeks of incarceration, when people are coming off alcohol and drugs, or are arriving in prison with severe mental health challenges.

We must tackle these issues in a positive way. One of the Minister's challenges is to ensure that we undertake a review of the strategy, particularly on psychoactive substances and drugs. The Government have said that they have rolled out new tests for psychoactive substances across the estate; can the Minister tell us how many have taken place and their outcome? The Government have said that they have trained more than 300 dogs to detect these substances; does every prison have access to those dogs, and do those dogs ensure we catch substances that are smuggled in? The Government have said they are making smuggling psychoactive substances into prisons and possession of them criminal offences; I want us to monitor how we enforce that legislation.

The Minister must look at introducing planned searches of prisoners in prisons. He must also look at whether there should be searches of prison officers and delivery staff. I spoke this week to prison officers who said they would welcome that because they want to weed out corruption among staff. I want the Minister to tell us how that will be undertaken generally. I also want the Minister to take further steps to ensure that all category C prisons have netting around them, to stop people throwing drugs and other things into prisons.

I want to see the re-establishment of the dog units, not just as the regionalised resource that they are now, but as a resource that can be allocated locally.

We must look at the criminal gangs inside and outside prisons who are making money out of the delivery of drugs into prisons by many means. What I do not get from the Government is what their overall strategy is, and I think that feeling is shared by external agencies such as Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons. I see a number of individual measures, but I do not get the overall strategy. Will the Minister also tell me what is happening with reform prisons? We had a report this week about Holme House prison, which showed that every indicator was going in the wrong direction. It showed more drug use, more self-harm and more attacks on staff—and that is in a reform prison. We need to know who is accountable for that, and what plans are in place to drive improvements in that prison.

Time is extremely pressing, so I shall just ask the Minister one more question. When the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), appeared before the Justice Committee recently, I asked whether the Oakhill training centre was now performing to a contractual level with which he was satisfied, and he replied, "Currently, they are." Since that discussion, a report on Oakhill has shown that, yet again, that establishment is not performing to the required standard. Will the Minister tell me what concrete steps are being taken to improve performance at Oakhill? If the improvements that have been set out are not made, will he seek to remove the contract from G4S, as has happened elsewhere?

1.1 pm

**Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), and indeed to work with them on the Justice Committee. I apologise to the House that I will not be here for the wind-ups. I have already apologised to the Minister and to you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I might be here in body at the moment, but my heart is currently in court 47 of the High Court, where my district council and our brilliant campaigning group are bringing a judicial review against our clinical commissioning group for its failure to consult us properly on changes to our local hospital. I will be whizzing along there immediately after I have spoken today. Nothing else could stop me talking about prisons, as colleagues in the House well know.

I realised during my time in the judicial review yesterday how much I, as a former civil servant, cared about evidence and good government. That is why I shall focus on the importance of data provision today. I am disappointed that the Prisons and Courts Bill did not make it into this parliamentary Session, but I accept

that many of the changes envisaged by the Minister do not require legislation and can be taken forward in other ways. However, those changes must be driven by reliable performance data. During my two and a half years on the Justice Committee, we have asked successive Ministers for up-to-date information on prison safety indicators such as incidents of disorder, staffing levels and activity levels, including the number of hours each day prisoners spend locked in their cells. Our efforts have resulted in better-quality data on recruitment and retention, but we have struggled to scrutinise the Government's efforts to improve the overall situation because we have not received all the information we need.

The Secretary of State delivered welcome news when he appeared in front of the Committee in October and told us about the justice data hub, which went live the following day. I encourage hon. Members to look up the data hub on the Ministry of Justice website—though possibly not during the debate. It holds information ranging from prisoners' perceptions of safety to accredited programme completions and deaths in custody. I am far from techie myself, but I have tried the hub out and found it quite easy to use. It is definitely a step in the right direction, but much of the information on it is based on annual statistical releases. If we are truly committed to reform in our prisons, we need more data that really drills down on specifics. We need to know how much time prisoners are spending locked in their cells on a daily basis, and to be able to work out whether the funding given to the most under-pressure prisons has actually had an impact.

I am in regular contact with Ian Blakeman, the governor of HMP Bullingdon in my constituency. He was very understanding when I had to postpone our meeting, which had been scheduled for this afternoon, so that I could speak in this debate. The prison recently underwent an inspection and areas of improvement were identified, but without comparative performance data and without knowing where he stands in comparison to other prisons, it is difficult for the governor to feel genuinely empowered to achieve the better outcomes we are all looking for.

We must also know more about what our prisoners are doing once they have completed their sentences. The online hub tells us how prepared prisoners feel on release, but nothing more about those who find housing or employment after they have left prison. We know that there are some fantastic organisations working hard to prepare prisoners for their release, including the Clink restaurant and the Langley House Trust, which provides specialist housing, programmes and support services in the community for people seeking to live crime-free. Just 2.6% of people in the trust's housing are reconvicted, which is one of the lowest rates in the country.

**Ms Buck:** The borough of Westminster has the highest incidence of rough sleeping in the country. Does the hon. Lady share my concern that those involved in Westminster Council's rough sleeping strategy have found that one in three rough sleepers have been released from prison? We have to make finding a stable and secure home central to the issue of prisoner release.

**Victoria Prentis:** I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. Housing is absolutely key to the proper rehabilitation of offenders. I do not think I would be breaching any

confidences by saying that the Justice Committee will be working with other Select Committees to ensure that we fully cover the issues relating to housing in the coming parliamentary Session.

The Kainos Community transforms lives through the Challenge to Change programme, which includes post-release mentoring. To break the cycle of reoffending, we must have more data to target projects like these where they are most needed and most effective. Becoming a data-driven Department is a laudable ambition, but it is vital that the statistics we are given do more than scratch the surface. Prison management and the provision of safe and decent prison conditions that promote rehabilitation are complex tasks. They must be well grounded in evidence. Finding solutions to the problems our prisons are facing requires us to delve much deeper than we have yet done. In conclusion, off I go to court to deal with the way in which good government is run, but I ask all hon. Members to remember that, when considering prisons, data really matters.

1.7 pm

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure, as a newly elected member of the Justice Committee, to speak in today's debate. Last Thursday, members of the Committee visited HMP Rochester. Rochester holds 740 prisoners and conditions in that Victorian prison have been described as deplorable by the independent monitoring board. In March 2017, the Government announced that the prison would be closed and replaced, but in October 2017 that was put on hold. Many of the facilities at HMP Rochester are in a state of disrepair. For instance, the classroom in which rehabilitation lessons take place has a leaking roof.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): On that point, and the point made a few moments ago about data, it is extremely important to have adequate data if we are to provide education and training. The Prisoners Education Trust and the Ministry of Justice have both reported that reoffending goes down by an average of five percentage points if education can be provided.

**Ellie Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I agree that education is absolutely at the heart of the rehabilitation of offenders.

At Rochester, when it rains, lessons have to be cancelled because the roof leaks. These issues have to be addressed urgently if we are to reform our prisons and improve standards. Visiting cells there, we saw prisoners in cramped and unsanitary conditions. One cell that housed three men had a toilet that was screened by little more than plastic sheeting and had no toilet lid. In addition, the perimeter fence is low and not comprehensively covered by CCTV. This has led to drugs, particularly Spice and other psychoactive substances, frequently being thrown over the fence, with 47 drug-related incidents recorded in just one week. We were told it would cost £300,000 to install a fit-for-purpose CCTV system and that the benefits would be immeasurable. We also visited the drug rehabilitation wing, but the 12-step rehabilitation programme had to stop when the prison received its now rescinded closure notice. These are the conditions that the governor and staff at HMP Rochester are battling daily and I commend them for their work.

[Ellie Reeves]

One of the key factors in rehabilitation and safety in our prisons is the prison population. It has been fluctuating around the 85,000 mark for nearly a decade and as of this month stands at 86,000. The Government have been asked repeatedly why the numbers continue to grow, and their answers usually follow the template that more people are convicted of sex-related offences and are serving longer sentences. Although that may be the case in part, we must also look at the wider picture to understand fully why our prison population continues to rise. We cannot look at offences and sentence length alone to answer this question.

Long-term cuts to mental health services, addiction support and housing have all played a part and had an impact on our prison population through reoffending rates. The Ministry of Justice's latest figures show that 29.6% of offenders in the October to December 2015 cohort reoffended within a year. Cuts mean less support when these individuals require more than most. The Howard League's "No Fixed Abode" study from 2016 estimated that a third of released prisoners have no accommodation to go to on leaving prison. The Combined Homelessness and Information Network's annual report on rough sleeping in London showed that 33% of people seen sleeping rough had some experience of being in prison. Let me repeat that: a third of all prisoners are likely to be homeless on release.

**Jo Churchill:** Does the hon. Lady agree that that relates to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) about not being able to keep the data? It is well known that health outcomes for those who sleep rough are less good, and we find ourselves with a never-ending cycle of people bouncing between the street and prison, and in and out of the system, with little care and attention to find, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) said, the treasure in man's soul.

**Ellie Reeves:** I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. One issue that has been raised with us is that people are imprisoned for short sentences of two or three months, and during that time there is no chance of any rehabilitation. We need to look more closely at community-based sentencing, so that people can get rehabilitation and come out of the cycle of prison and homelessness. That is an important point.

To reduce reoffending rates, we need to stop the spiral of prison services being eviscerated, leaving inmates with little help in their rehabilitation work. It is a commonly held view across the House that prison is not there merely to punish offenders, protect society and act a deterrent; it must also exist to rehabilitate and re-educate. Those aims can ultimately reduce the risk of reoffending by providing services to inmates that will provide them with the necessary skills that mean that on their release from prison they will be best equipped to fit back into society and mitigate their chances of falling into a cycle of criminal behaviour.

When prisoners are incarcerated, the state is responsible for their wellbeing. We must not view this responsibility lightly; if we are to reduce crime and, in turn, our prisoner population, we must fix the wider problem pieces of this complex jigsaw. Departmental figures

released last Friday show that our prison system is operating at close to maximum capacity. This is not sustainable and it is not a simple case of longer sentences for more serious crimes. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that the system in which these prisoners are treated is comprehensive in its ability to provide rehabilitation; only then will we see our prison population decline.

In conclusion, it is clear that multiple things must be addressed for us to secure decent and sustainable prison reforms and to ensure that the prison population is manageable and kept at a safe level. I have been able to draw attention to only a small number of concerns, and I hope Members will touch on other issues. Until the prison population is under control, I fear that reform and safety standards will suffer. Three people to a room in a Victorian-era prison with limited sanitation, derelict and dilapidated amenities, little or no rehabilitation work, and an uncertain future for "imprisonment for public protection" prisoners both inside and outside prison; this is not where we should be in a 21st-century justice system.

We have by no means the worst prison services in the world, but we could and should do better. I look forward to furthering those aims with my fellow Committee members in due course.

1.15 pm

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** I have three questions for the Minister. First, he has heard our concerns about the quality of the ageing estate and the living conditions of prisoners. What is he going to do about it? My second question relates to the status of the Government's closure plans and the plans to update and replace our ageing prisons. What is he going to do about it? My third is about the impact of the uncertainty over closures on what the prisons are trying to do to update and improve their facilities.

To deal with my first question, the Minister will have seen, as we have, responses from the chief inspector of prisons. The Minister has heard from Members today that in many prisons they have seen the showers and lavatory facilities are filthy and dilapidated, and there are no credible or affordable plans for refurbishment. In a report published only a couple of months ago, the chief inspector of prisons said:

"prisoners are held in conditions that fall short of what most members of the public would consider as reasonable or decent".

My question on what the Government are doing to address that is therefore very relevant.

On my second question, the Minister himself said only a couple of months ago that although his first priority is to ensure public protection and provide accommodation for all those sentenced by the courts, the commitment to close old prisons remains a viable option with which he wishes to continue. I would like to hear some detail about what is happening with that programme. The prison estate transformation programme reconfigured the estate into three functions looking after reception, training and resettlement, and those three are crucial to the better treatment of prisoners. The Ministry was also given £1.3 billion in 2015 as part of the spending review to invest over the next five years

to transform the prison estates. What exactly is happening to that, what progress is being made and how is it being dealt with?

As for my third question, on the impact of the uncertainty about closure on prison performance and staff morale, I would echo the comments made by the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) about the visit to Rochester prison. I was unable to go on that visit myself, but it is crucial that the lessons from it are learned. One lesson was, as governors told the Committee, that the decision about investing in maintenance or improving the facilities had not gone ahead since the announcement that the prison would close. As we have heard, the old 1840s prison buildings there are described as “deplorable” and “deteriorating”. That has an impact on recruitment, which had been frozen in Rochester, and it proves demoralising to staff.

I think that those three questions are the most pertinent.

**Robert Neill:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the Rochester issue. He might like to know that we found on one wing that some 22 showers had been out of operation for months. When we spoke to people there, they said that the nub of the problem was that the facilities management contractors do not see the governors as their client. They see their client relationship being with MOJ’s commercial arm. That needs to be got right, because it means that the efforts of governors get nowhere—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Can I be honest? We need shorter interventions. The hon. Gentleman was hoping to get two minutes at the end of the debate; he is eating into those two minutes, and he will understand if he does not get them.

**John Howell:** I fully accept the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), which goes back to what I said about the prison having given up on trying to invest any money in refurbishment or in replacing its ageing facilities. I have already quoted the chief inspector of prisons, who said that the shower and lavatory facilities in many prisons are filthy and dilapidated.

What will the Government do to address our concerns about the quality of the ageing estate? What are they doing about the current programme of reform and estate modernisation? What impact is the uncertainty about closures having both on the prisons themselves and on the lives of prisoners? Those are the three most relevant questions.

1.20 pm

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The English prison system is in crisis. It is failing inmates, prison officers and, fundamentally, society, as the hard-hitting motion tabled by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) makes clear. Building more prison places will not solve the problem. The prison population tends to expand to fill the places available, often even before the places are built.

As the Howard League puts it,

“trying to deal with only the supply of prison resources and prison places will not work. We now need to manage demand and, in the process, ask some fundamental questions about who we send to prison and why.”

It is therefore surprising that the UK Government are pursuing a strategy of building an industrial-scale prison complex in my nation.

With that in mind, I will focus on the UK Government’s decision to outsource the crisis in the English prison system to Wales, rather than fix it. On 27 February 2017, the Ministry of Justice opened the biggest prison in Europe in north Wales—HMP Berwyn. Once fully operational, the prison will have the capacity to hold more than 2,100 male prisoners. I am sure it will not be a revelation to many in this House that piling a few thousand prisoners into a small corner of north Wales is not expected to be conducive to rehabilitation. Whether it is the left-leaning Howard League or the Centre for Social Justice founded by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), there is agreement that these prisons do not rehabilitate.

Even more galling, HMP Berwyn will not meet the demands of the nation in which it is being built. HMP Berwyn alone will have 800 more places than there are inmates in Wales. In March 2017, the UK Government announced plans to build a new super-prison in Baglan, Port Talbot. Yet again, this prison is not being built for our needs. It will be for 1,600 inmates shipped into Port Talbot. A person does not need a Fields medal to work out that adding the 800 surplus places at Berwyn to the 1,600 surplus places at the proposed Baglan prison would mean 2,400 more places than are required in Wales.

The truth of the matter is that Wales is England’s affordable penal colony. Westminster is turning old south Wales into a homage to 19th-century New South Wales. Those are not my words but the comments of Frances Crook, the chief executive officer of the Howard League. Ms Crook went as far as to draw a parallel between the infamous Botany Bay penal colony and Wales—a rather extreme but, none the less, fitting analogy.

Plaid Cymru has always been against the building of these monstrous prisons in Wales. Currently, however, the plans are being taken ahead with the Labour Welsh Government’s blessing. In fact, the Labour Welsh Government in Cardiff could stop the development if they so decided, because the proposed Baglan prison would be built on Welsh Government land, if only they would, for once, put the interests and requirements of Wales first.

Wales does not want or need another super-prison, much as it did not need the first. Because of the lack of distinct legal jurisdiction, Westminster can still impose prisons on Wales. Northern Ireland and Scotland are off limits thanks to their more generous devolution settlements, but not my country. The existing prison estate in Wales is far from perfect, but we need Welsh solutions to Welsh problems.

Welsh young offenders and women offenders are being sent over the border to England, a damning indictment of the policy currently applied to Wales. Devolution of the prison estate and the criminal justice system must be a priority for the sake of offenders, taxpayers and the communities afflicted by the UK Government’s super-prison policies.

[Jonathan Edwards]

Piling thousands of prisoners on top of each other in these titan prisons is not conducive to rehabilitation or safety, be it for those detained or for those doing the detaining. Relying on some modern-day digital panopticon for the safety and operation of our prisons is neither sensible nor appropriate. All the evidence shows that smaller, more human prisons that do not put economies of scale ahead of outcomes are what our prison estates need.

I close with a plea to the UK and Welsh Governments: listen to the 9,000 signatories to the petition against the Port Talbot prison; listen to the experts from every inch of the political spectrum who advise against these behemoth prisons; listen to the former inmates; listen to the residents; and listen to Wales. We will not become England's penal colony.

1.25 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): There are three issues that could promote the progress of effective prison reform, all of which relate to improving prisoners' contact with their families. As time is short, I will summarise those issues at the outset. First, there is a need to consider the appointment of a deputy director for families, mirroring the staffing priority given to drugs and violence in prisons. Secondly, there is a need to speed up the long-awaited policy announcement on the revised procedures for release on temporary licence. Thirdly, could Skype and other innovative face-to-face digital platforms be used to strengthen prisoners' family ties?

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) for successfully championing the importance of good-quality family contact to prisoners and their rehabilitation when he was Prisons Minister. His leadership paved the way for the excellent Farmer review.

The need to replicate the good practice that exists across the prison estate in supporting prisoners' family ties and to address inconsistencies in that area was one of the key messages of the Farmer review, "The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime," published earlier this year. I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) for his wholehearted commitment to implementing in full every one of the Farmer review's 21 recommendations.

Another reason for the Farmer review so successfully gaining traction in government is that senior officials are personally committed to the families agenda, often because they have been No. 1 governors in prisons and have seen at first hand the difference made by good family contact. However, this important agenda cannot be dependent on an individual official's conviction that it matters. Civil servants move on.

Indeed, Paul Baker, the most senior official working on the implementation of the Farmer review, is leaving at the end of the year. I pause here to acknowledge the decades of excellent service he has given to our Prison Service, his dogged pursuit of reform and his championing of prisoners' families, who are among the most neglected and stigmatised people in this country.

Mr Baker currently heads that work alongside his responsibilities as deputy director of custody for London and Thames Valley, a large group of prisons. In other words, the families agenda is tagged on to a very demanding existing work load. Does the Minister agree that now would be the ideal time to give this agenda the same priority within the management structure of the prisons system as drugs and violence, each of which has a dedicated deputy director? If the importance of family and other relationships is to be the golden thread running through our prisons, we need senior staff who are mandated to keep the issue salient until it is embedded in the estate as firmly as action to combat drugs and violence. Indeed, family involvement drives improvements in those other areas.

Will the Minister kindly look at speeding up the development and announcement of the release on temporary licence policy? ROTL allows for the temporary release of prisoners, where it is safe to do so, to undertake purposeful activities that will benefit their resettlement, including rebuilding closer ties with their family. If men undertake parenting and other family learning courses, such as on how to be a responsible father, open conditions such as ROTL give them the opportunity to put theory into practice.

Exceptional negative incidents will always be reported, but the evidence showing high rates of compliance with ROTL terms and a consequential reduction in reoffending rates is positive. For example, an offender could attend parent-teacher evenings, as well as case conferences to discuss their child protection and care proceedings. This also helps families adjust to having the person around more. Many prisoners begin to feel less legitimate as a parent, which makes it difficult to build rounded relationships with their child, and ROTL would help boost their confidence as a parent. Indicators suggest that all forms of ROTL have fallen significantly since 2013. Governors have been waiting for guidance on this for more than a year and do need it now.

Finally, may I ask the Minister whether Skype or other face-to-face platforms could be used to aid prisoners' family contact time, enabling digital visits to homes to see their family members in that context?

1.30 pm

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): First, I apologise to the House and to the Minister if I cannot be here for the wind-ups. I also commend the diligence of the Justice Committee for bringing this debate forward, as it is incredibly important that the House has a chance to focus on this issue of safety and reform. Lots of organisations in the wider community are also campaigning on these areas, and I particularly want to draw the House's attention to the work of the Community trade union, the largest trade union in the private prisons sector. It has a strong set of recommendations and campaigns for a safer justice sector. I urge the Minister to look at the work Community is doing and its important recommendations. That would add to this issue.

I simply want to talk about Her Majesty's prison Nottingham, which is in my constituency, where recently we have sadly seen very difficult pressures starting to grow. We have had five deaths in custody since the summer, some of which have been suicide and on some

of which we have not yet had the coroner's report and recommendations. It is therefore still early days in terms of knowing whether there is a common pattern of events in these cases. I have met the governor, Tom Wheatley, and spoken with the diligent independent monitoring board—these are volunteers who go in every week to check out things such as safety in the prison.

The biggest problem in the prison is the cycle of drugs and smuggling, be it of Spice or mamba, to which many hon. Members have alluded. How these drugs are getting into the prison has to get national attention. Sometimes they are thrown over prison walls, but more often than not—it is difficult to be fully certain—there is a smuggling process whereby prisoners secrete drugs upon their person to bring them into jail. Some inmates are finding themselves affected by those psychoactive substances, but in a way it is just as bad that gang operations are going on within the prisons, as they are putting pressures on some offenders who go out on licence, halfway through their sentence. Incredibly, people are almost driven to reoffend, deliberately to break their licence, so that they can go back into prison in order to smuggle more drugs back in. It is an astonishing idea that in the 21st century there is reoffending as a way of making a living, but some prisoners are in that cycle.

I urge the Minister to think creatively about how to break that problem. There is a question of resources involved. A ridiculous number of experienced officers have been taken out in recent years. I know that things are stabilising now and that new officers are being recruited, but that experienced officer set is what we need to retain to ensure the situation does not get any worse.

I encourage the Minister to think about ways of breaking that cycle of people reoffending on licence, perhaps by getting the courts to randomise which prisons reoffenders are returned to. That might stop this notion that the prisoner breaking their licence knows they will be going back into a certain prison, such as Nottingham. If we can break that, we might be able to deal with this issue. I know that there are networks across other prisons, which are difficult to break, but we need creative solutions. It is important that the designated keyworker programme that has started in Nottingham is extended so that officers can get to know inmates a little more effectively. It is not just those on vulnerable watch who, sadly, we have seen taking their own lives. That is an important programme to be continued.

Also on communications, we need to make sure we regularise access to telephone calls for prisoners, because there is a smuggling problem in respect of mobile phones, too. If we got into a situation where we had regularised phone calls and access to approved family members, some of the pressures and strains on inmates could be lessened. We need creative solutions. Resources are part of this, but it is not just about them, which is why I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), the Chair of the Committee, for securing this important debate for the House to pay attention to today.

1.35 pm

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), who talked about his experiences of his

local prison, and I am pleased to be part of today's debate. I believe there is general consensus in the Chamber about the fact that our prison system is not perfect, but I acknowledge that the Government have an ambitious programme for reform that will benefit not only offenders, but communities across the country. In particular, I welcome the 2,500 new prison officers who will be appointed and the provision of 5,600 body cameras, not just for prison officers, but for the police—that issue has been raised with me in particular.

I wish to focus my speech on gardening and the environment in the prison system, and I make no excuses for that, because it has a lot of potential to be helpful. We know that imprisoning somebody does not in itself reduce reoffending rates. As a number of Members have said, to do that we must try to give these people skills to increase their employability chances and help them to reintegrate back into the community. That is where environmental and gardening schemes can really help. As I have said before in the Chamber, many prisons are old and outdated, with little green space. There is definite data to show that when people are not in contact with green space and nature, it has a real impact on their mental health. I want to talk about a couple of good schemes that can show how this is useful.

The Eden Project has teamed up with Dartmoor prison to transform a disused exercise yard into a gardening project within the resettlement unit, from which local residents can buy vegetables, flowers and eggs. Such schemes are starting to crop up in many prisons across the country. When I was a television reporter, I went to Leyhill prison, near Bristol, which had a fabulous gardening project. It had state-of-the-art greenhouses and its gardening projects won gold medals at Chelsea. Lots of those projects need to be either reinstated—some have dropped away—or regenerated. The Conservation Foundation is about to start a "Gardening against the odds" project in Wandsworth prison. The project will extend across three exercise yards that are currently just tarmac, and will bring together prisoners, staff, members of the community, leading horticulturists and environmentalists.

Such schemes can stimulate mental and physical health. As I said, they also teach skills and disciplines that can improve employability. I recently met the British Association of Landscape Industries, which represents a £6 billion industry that is crying out for people to work for it, so there are opportunities if we can skill people up in these areas before they get back into the working world. Lots of these projects are not costly—they are cost-effective and highly beneficial—so I hope that the Minister will make reference to them. Earlier in the year, he replied to one of my oral questions by mentioning a prison gardening competition and inviting me to be a judge. I hope he is going to stick to the offer, because I would very much like to do that.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah):** I confirm the invitation to my hon. Friend to be a judge in the prison gardening competition, at her convenience—the invitation is open.

**Rebecca Pow:** I thank the Minister for that. I am of course hoping that I will be allowed out by the Whips, as this is a very important initiative. Once it gets more attention, more people will enter the competition.

[Rebecca Pow]

The Forestry Commission runs an interesting offenders and nature scheme, with offenders typically working as volunteers on nature conservation and woodland sites. They get out to do tasks such as building footpaths, creating boardwalks and establishing ponds, and learn about conservation and the environment. That, too, is very cost-effective, and at the same time it addresses several of the underlying factors that contribute to reoffending.

The Phoenix Futures recovery charity works with people, both in and out of prison, who struggle with drug and alcohol addiction. We have heard a lot about the drug problem in our prisons today. The charity is supported by the National Lottery, and it runs a recovery through nature programme, which aims to connect those who use the charity's services with nature to assist their recovery. It has been shown that those who participate in the project have an incredible 41% higher chance of recovery than the national average, so I can tell the Minister that there is mileage in it.

Many of the ideas I have mentioned are included in a Conservative Environment Network pamphlet, to which many Members contributed, which calls for a more holistic and cross-departmental approach to environmental policy. This Government are doing great work on the environment and bringing it into many areas, but let us add an environmental strand to our prison reform.

I do not know how many Members have seen the film "Paddington 2". Perhaps you have, Madam Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption.*] Oh, well you should see it; it is fantastic. Paddington used cooking to improve the lives of prisoners, and I am saying, "Let's use gardening."

We have a great opportunity. We need change. The situation is challenging. I am not saying that this is the answer to everything, but it is one small tool to add to the box—or the greenhouse—that might help us to address the problem. Ultimately, it will improve the lives of so many people who deserve it.

1.41 pm

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Nelson Mandela said:

"It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones."

Those words should be at the forefront of our minds as we consider the ways in which prisons operate in England and Wales.

With £3.954 billion of annual expenditure, prisons take up the largest share of the Ministry of Justice's budget. That goes towards maintaining the 118 adult prisons and keeping roughly 86,000 people in prison. According to 2015-16 figures, that works out at a staggering £32,510 per prisoner.

As a member of the Justice Committee, a week ago I made a very interesting visit to Cookham Wood young offenders institute and Medway secure training centre. I was heartened to see the education and training provided, but at the same time I was concerned to learn that, due to staffing levels, young people were not getting the 27 hours of education that they were supposed to get. Instead, they were receiving just half that amount.

In my view, that seriously hampers the rehabilitation of those young men and increases the chances of them reoffending.

I was also concerned about the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic young offenders at Cookham Wood, and I want to link that to the Lammy review, which was published on 8 September, and improving outcomes for young black and/or Muslim men in the criminal justice system. The review states that BAME people make up 3% of the population but more than 12% of the adult prison population, and the proportion of under-18s in custody who are BAME has risen from 25% in 2006 to 41% in 2016. There is a disproportionate number of BAME prisoners in the criminal justice system at a cost to taxpayers of at least £309 million each year.

The Lammy review highlighted three key themes for action. The first is to strengthen the link between scrutiny and equitable decision making on the fairness of the system. That means using the principle of "explain or reform", so that if there is no evidence-based explanation for the disparities, they should be addressed through reform. The second is understanding and addressing the trust deficit. The Centre for Justice Innovation has found that more than half of British-born BAME people believe that the criminal justice system discriminates against particular groups, compared with 35% of British-born white people. The third is identifying where responsibilities lie beyond the criminal justice system. Issues include parenting, the exploitation of young people, and the need for closer work with communities to hold offenders to account.

The review made 35 recommendations and considered how they relate to prisons, among other areas, and preventing reoffending. One of the recommendations was to collect data. What do the Government plan to do in relation to collecting and disclosing data on the ethnicity of prisoners and offenders?

I am also concerned about the basic screening custody tool for reception and resettlement. I am aware of problems faced by community rehabilitation centres and their subcontractors in receiving data that would help them to inform their view of what help a prisoner may need for resettlement. I am firmly of the view that more investment is needed for resettlement to work in prison.

As has been said, there is serious concern about the state of some of our older prisons, whose living conditions are poor and inadequate. Hon. Members may have read recently about the appalling conditions at HMP Liverpool. There is also concern about the staffing of our prisons, with 95 out of 104 of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service prisons being understaffed. There are 13% fewer operational staff than in 2010, and we all know that a full complement of staff is required to keep prisoners safe and protected from violence, and to help to reduce the prevalence of psychoactive drugs in our prisons.

One of the reasons why there is such demand for psychoactive drugs is the fact that many prisoners are locked up for long periods. It is a widely held view that more purposeful activity outside cells is a good way to reduce demand for drugs. Similarly, more staffing would help to keep vulnerable prisoners safe. It is worrying that there were 120 suicides in prison in 2016, which was double the number in 2012. We need to keep prison staff

safe as well. In the 12 months prior to March 2017, there were 7,159 assaults on prison staff, which was a 32% increase on the previous 12-month period.

In conclusion, the Minister and the Ministry of Justice have much work to do if they want to reduce reoffending among prisoners.

1.46 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Prison safety and reform will continue to be major priorities for the Justice Committee until the challenges facing prisons are stabilised. I want to focus on governor empowerment and on young adults in our prisons.

The increase in assaults, self-harm and self-inflicted deaths are all unsurprising, given rising prisoner numbers, over-occupied prisons, understaffing, and the wave of psychoactive drugs that have been washing over prisons for the past couple of years. How can the system turn prisoners' lives around when too many are locked up for 22 hours a day and are unable to access education, treatment or work? Those are major challenges not only for prison governors, but for Ministers, the MOJ and the Prisons and Probation Service.

In the Queen's Speech of 2016, there was a plan that prisons would be independent legal entities, with the power to enter into contracts, generate income and appoint their own boards. Both the Secretary of State and, more recently, one of his Ministers have said that they remain committed to continuing to work towards not only making prisons places of safety, but reforming them.

The Justice Committee, of which I have been a member since September, agrees that prison management and the provision of safe and secure prison conditions that promote rehabilitation are complex activities that must be well grounded in evidence. I would add that adequate resources are also crucial.

I remember, once upon a time, when governors could be incentivised to reduce the reoffending rates of those released from their establishments. Even now, there are many examples of positive good practice in prison, a number of which have been mentioned today. Overarching that, however, there appears to be no joined-up strategy of rehabilitation, or even of reform. The prison system seems to be always in crisis management mode. This is exactly the time for clear lines of accountability between the Ministry of Justice, the Prison and Probation Service and governors. Those lines appear fuzzy at best to members of the Justice Committee.

What is the current status of devolution to governors? What support have governors been given to implement the empowerment agenda? Where is the review of reform prisons? Overarching that, where are the levers, and who gets upset when there are failures?

I want to move on to young adults in the criminal justice system. I draw the House's attention to my former trusteeship of the Barrow Cadbury Trust, which initiated the Transition to Adulthood Alliance. Young adults aged 18 to 25 are a distinct group: only 10% of the general population, but accounting for 17% of those sentenced to prison every year. That is, admittedly, a drop from 25%, but is still too many people at a key stage in their vulnerable lives. Research shows that when policy makers, sentencers and practitioners take

into account developmental maturity and the particular needs of young adults, they are more likely to grow out of crime.

Those results were reflected in a key recommendation by the Justice Committee in its inquiry into young adults in 2016. A week ago, the MOJ released a study that supports the Transition to Adulthood Alliance's long-standing campaign for criminal justice agencies to take account of young adults' maturity in service design and delivery. Given the Government's research findings, what assurance can they give that they will provide a distinct regime for young adult offenders, as proposed by the T2A Alliance and the Justice Committee?

We all have to ask what prisons are for. I hope that, instead of prisons just warehousing prisoners, as too often seems to be the case, the Secretary of State and the Minister will take responsibility for ensuring that our prisons are humane and safe, and that they turn lives around and reduce reoffending.

1.51 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Given the short time available, I hope that hon. Members will not mind if I restrict my comments to the conditions of my local prison, HMP Wormwood Scrubs, especially as this debate coincides with the publication of the independent monitoring board's report last week. I start by paying tribute to Rob Foreman, the chairman of the board, and his predecessor, Chris Hammond. They have done an excellent job, as do the overwhelming majority of staff at the prison, who show dedication and professionalism.

I was initially heartened when I read the covering press release, which said that promising changes had been made in some areas, such as the introduction of more CCTV and a new system for prisoners to access their property—it is true that in July the Scrubs went from grade 1, the worst grade which only a handful of prisons are in at any one time, to grade 2—but that is probably where the good news stops. We have to be frank about this: there is nothing new about problems at the Scrubs. Many years ago, it had problems with violence against prisoners and poor management. An HMI report in only April last year talked about rat-infested and overcrowded conditions, with some prisoners too frightened to leave their cells.

The difficulty is that the current problems are specifically connected to underfunding, poor services and low staff numbers, despite what we are told are efforts by the Government to increase staffing, having cut it back so dramatically under the coalition Government. There were still 57 members of staff out last year, and only 21 in.

The report says that

"complaints made by prisoners are sometimes handled inappropriately, or passed to the staff member who is the subject of the complaint."

It says that the

"lack of maintenance...means that prisoners are frequently subjected to conditions that are indecent and not suitable for them to live in."

Prisoners experience unacceptable delays in accessing medical treatment, and the report says that

"Care UK is not always able to provide enough staff to deliver...triage and screening processes."

[*Andy Slaughter*]

On the key issue of safety, the report says that 40 to 50 violent incidents occur in a typical month, 25% of which are gang-related. The prison has “the second highest number of prisoners moved by ‘Tornado teams’” and had four deaths in custody.

A terrible contractor called Carillion is responsible for maintenance, but the report says that beds were in poor condition, that toilets were broken, that cells were unheated, that staff worked in overcoats, and that there were no working urinals in parts of the prison. People are living in medieval conditions.

As for the education services, attendance at classes in June was 24%, and the library was closed for several weeks because Carillion could not fix the alarm. The Koestler Trust, which does fantastic work in prisoner art, is based in the old governor’s house outside the prison, but there is no art teaching inside. These are truly terrible conditions.

The prison has the worst record in London for accessing legal help. What that means in practice, when solicitors try to see their clients, is, to quote the report, that “prisoners are effectively being denied access to legal advice.”

I ask the Minister to look at that, because it is not acceptable in any of our prisons, especially one that is 45% remand.

The private community rehabilitation company is MTCNovo, which I remember telling the shadow Justice Minister was not a good appointment. The report says that it does not sufficiently engage with prisoners before their release, with far too many released without any accommodation to go to. Is it any wonder that reoffending rates are so high when that is the background? It is not an accident that we are talking about companies such as Care UK, Carillion and MTCNovo. The privatisation of prison services lies behind what has happened to a substantial extent.

When the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) became Justice Secretary, we were promised a prisons revolution, but of course he did not stay around long enough to achieve that. It is odd to think that the right hon. Gentleman would be seen as the champion of the underdog in that way, but he was following the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), and a tip for anyone wants to have a good reputation is to follow him into a job. What will the Minister do to address the appalling conditions that are experienced every day in our prisons?

1.56 pm

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): I want to concentrate on just one aspect of the prison system: the workforce. Prison officers are working with people with complex mental health issues and people who have experienced trauma throughout their lives. Prison officers work day in and day out with people who may assault them. They keep watch over people who want to end their life. They are at the forefront of tackling organised crime; work to intercept drugs; have to work in high-conflict and high-tension situations; and suffer intolerable abuse. Prison officers have told me about the unbelievable and disgusting practice of “potting”, which involves prisoners dumping a bucket of urine and excrement over the head of a prison officer. They are routinely spat at. Every day, 20 staff are assaulted.

Somehow, prison officers are not seen as frontline workers, but I want to challenge that in the strongest terms. Although their work is behind closed doors, their heroics should be seen and valued in the same way as other public sector workers.

The increase in violence and tension in prisons cannot be seen in a vacuum. It is part of the perfect storm that has been mentioned—huge cuts to prison staff, a massive increase in the use of the drug Spice, and an historically high prison population. Thousands of prisoner officer jobs have been cut. I know there has been an effort to recruit more prison officers, and that is welcome, but they enter the service on very different terms and conditions from those with longer service. Even those with longer service have had their terms and conditions radically altered. They are now expected to work much longer. Recruitment drives aside, the ability to retain new recruits remains in question.

I agree with the POA that 68 is too late a retirement age for such a strenuous and stressful job, and I support its members in challenging that increased pension age. It would be hard to argue against a clear correlation between the difficulties in recruitment and retention of prison staff and the erosion in pay, terms and conditions, alongside the difficult circumstances I have described. I met a prison officer recently who said that their pay was only £13 more than seven years ago, and that was someone with more than 30 years of service. That cannot be right.

Staff shortages are more pronounced in the south, but those shortages have an impact on other regions—in particular, the north-east—through the detached duty system. If I get anything out of this debate, I hope it is an assurance that the Minister will look into that system. It sees prison officers from my region being asked to work away from home for prolonged periods of time, staying in hotels and being sent to prisons where they do not have a long-standing relationship with the prisoners, and have no in-depth understanding or knowledge of their needs, issues or personalities, making shifts more precarious. The Justice Committee found that the first 13 months of the scheme cost the taxpayer £63.5 million. I would like to know how much that system has cost to date. Should the Department not have considered spending that money on providing incentives for those jobs, making it more likely that people in the south would apply? I am told that many workers in the north only accept detached duty because of their own dwindling pay.

If we are serious about addressing the crisis in our prisons, we must start with the workers. We have to ensure that they are working in safe conditions—I believe that that safety is in numbers—and that there is a concerted effort to keep more experienced workers alongside newer staff. Through the cuts, we have lost far too much organisational knowledge and experience in our Prison Service. There must be acknowledgement that being a prison officer is a strenuous frontline job. It is completely untenable to make these people work until 68, with that really difficult fitness test. In fact, it would be more expensive for the service through things such as temporary injury benefits and medical inefficiency payments.

We have to value these workers by turning the Prison Service into something that offers a career again, rather than just a job. To do this, we must stop wasting millions of pounds on short-term sticking-plaster solutions, and really invest in the workforce.

2 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) on setting the scene so well. We have heard constructive contributions from Members on both sides of the Chamber. It is always good to have a Northern Ireland contribution in a debate on a matter that, to be honest, is devolved. It is good to hear observations from us in Northern Ireland; we encourage some of the recommendations that have been made, and have some suggestions that the Minister could perhaps look into.

I am very much of the school of thought that prisons play a key part in the structure of the nation in a twofold manner. I am thinking of the three Rs. The first is clearly retribution, which happens because the prisoner has done wrong and the courts have decided on a jail sentence. But alongside that, we need the other Rs: rehabilitation and retraining. If those elements are part of the process, we have a genuine chance of turning people around. I want that to be part of what we are trying to achieve through legislation and through the Select Committee.

We cannot ignore the rising number of suicides in our prisons. I think every hon. Member who has spoken today has mentioned this, and it is important to do so. Although the number of suicides in prison has doubled since 2013, the prison population has also doubled over the same time. But the number of suicides in prison is still higher than the average in the general populace. In prison, 120 people per 100,000 commit suicide, which compares with 10.8 people per 100,000 outside prison. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point and see what we can do.

The Prison Reform Trust has stated that prisons in the UK are currently holding 7,300 people more than capacity. The hon. Member for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock) mentioned assaults on prison officers. I am very aware of that issue because a lot of people working in prisons in my constituency—this is not a point for the Minister to respond to—are subject to assaults on a regular basis. There has been a 27% increase in assaults compared with last year, and reports say that officers are outnumbered three to one in some prisons. We must consider the need to develop inmates into efficient and beneficial members of society, including those who have unfortunately been involved in assaulting prison officers. We need to turn this situation around.

The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), who is no longer in her place, mentioned gardening and the other work that has been done in some prisons. The Minister responded by giving her the opportunity to be the judge of the prisons' gardening competition. There are things that can be done, but we are not seeing enough of them. We need more to happen. We must work our hardest to prevent those who have served their time from becoming repeat offenders. It is so important to address that issue compassionately, directly, efficiently and in a way that actually works.

The fact that 26% of those who serve their time reoffend within the next six months provides us with a clear example of how the prison system has—I say this gently—failed them. Only one in four prisoners has a job to go to on release from prison, and one in five employers says they would exclude or would likely exclude former prisoners from the recruitment process.

Some 11% of those released from prison cannot get accommodation. It is important that we address these issues.

We are witnessing a dramatic change in the operation of our prisons, with fewer staff being responsible. We have not seen—again, I say this gently and graciously—the increase in the number of staff in prisons that perhaps we should have seen. I understand that only 75 members of staff have been recruited this year, when there is a dearth of more than 2,000. I also believe that 27% of frontline staff leave the role before two years of service. What are we doing to keep staff on board and not to lose them? We must establish a support system that helps new staff to acclimatise and adjust, not simply leave the service.

There are significantly high levels of mental health issues within our prisons. An unbelievable 26% of women and 16% of men in prison have received treatment or are currently receiving treatment for a mental health problem in the first year of their sentence. Everyone in this Chamber wants the same thing; it is about how we achieve it. I look to the Minister for his response; we are all here to support him. I hope we can get the results that we want.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Before I call the spokesman for the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), I am sure that it does not compromise my impartiality in the Chair if I wish him and his colleagues in Paisley the best of luck for the exciting announcement in about four and a half hours' time of which town or city will be the city of culture 2021. I hope it is going to be Paisley—good luck.

2.6 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was concerned that I would be unable to shoehorn a mention of Paisley 2021 into a speech on prison reform in England and Wales, but you have managed it for me, so thanks very much. I will carry your best wishes back home on the 4.55 pm flight, if I make it to Heathrow on time. It is also an honour, as usual, to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

Although I am a relatively new member of the Justice Committee, and although some of my contribution today will be based on my short experience serving on the Committee, I should note that I am speaking from the SNP Front Bench and will tailor my remarks appropriately.

The small matter of prison reform in England and Wales has dominated much of the work of the Justice Committee since I was appointed after the general election, and it will continue to feature heavily in the coming weeks and months. However, this work is not new to the Committee, given its good work on this issue in the last Session, particularly on scrutinising reforms put forward by previous Justice Secretaries.

The Queen's Speech was a missed opportunity for the Government to introduce a Bill that would continue the reforms of the English and Welsh Prison Service. This was unfortunate, as the evidence is clear—indeed, the Committee saw for itself just last week—that the Prison Service is facing some very real challenges. The Government cannot be distracted by Brexit at the expense of modernising the English and Welsh justice systems.

[Gavin Newlands]

Despite the required reforms being wide-ranging, I will consign my remarks to the attempts that are being made to keep people out of the criminal justice system, including the attempts to reduce reoffending. The goal of keeping people out of prison is a basic premise that I am sure we can all agree on. Not only is it good for the individual; it is vital for our wider society and economy. Prison is obviously a necessary and appropriate route for those who commit serious crimes, but detaining an individual has to be for the right reasons and it should not be seen as the automatic result for everyone who commits a crime.

Reducing the prison population is a key feature of the Government's proposed reforms to the Prison Service and it is easy to see why that is the case. An exceedingly high prison population is not uncommon in most western democracies, but it is still worth noting that the total prison population in England and Wales on 31 March this year was just over 85,500 people. The recent prison population trend is cause for great concern and will rightly be a major influence in any reforms that the Government eventually introduce.

An exceedingly high prison population serves little good. It is not good for society, the economy or the taxpayer. In many cases, it will not be good for the offender or, indeed, the victim. The current prison population of England and Wales raises some difficult questions for the justice system. As we seek to confront this issue, we should be asking ourselves whether we are detaining the right people or if the criminal justice system still considers prison time to be the automatic outcome for the majority of those who commit crimes.

The PCS, too, has spoken of the significant changes that have affected the Prison Service. Chiefly, the prison population has doubled in the last 30 years while successive Governments have failed to protect funding and staffing numbers. That, in turn, helps to create a much more difficult, stressful and dangerous working environment for those working in the Prison Service.

I repeat that most other European countries are facing similar problems. However, we should take note of the Council of Europe report, which concludes that the UK has the highest prison population rate in western Europe. It states that England and Wales has a prison population rate of around 148 inmates per 100,000 citizens—well above the European average of 134.

In Scotland, we face similar challenges with our prison population. However, the annual daily average prison population has decreased in each of the last five years, falling by over 8% over that period, from 8,179 in 2011-12 to 7,500 in 2016-17. In addition, in the same period, the young offender population has almost halved, with numbers for remand and sentenced prisoners also dropping by that proportion.

However, the Scottish Government are not complacent. At a time when crime is at a 41-year low and recidivism rates are the lowest in 16 years, our prison population is still far too high, particularly among female offenders.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has run an excellent campaign for Paisley 2021, and I very much hope that he gets the news he is looking for tonight.

Will my hon. Friend join me in commending the Scottish Government, and particularly the Justice Secretary, Michael Matheson, for the progressive approach we have seen towards women in the prison system? Will he also welcome the £1.5 million extra for community justice services for women?

**Gavin Newlands:** Absolutely. I could not agree more. In addition, we are going to close the Cornton Vale prison in 2020, demolish the old facility and move 80 women who need more security, as well as having five new community facilities, which the £1.5 million additional investment will pay for.

Another area where the UK Government may want to take inspiration from the Scottish Government is the policy of a presumption against short sentences, which was recently augmented in the programme for government, with a plan to consult on an extension of the presumption from three months to 12 months. Overwhelming evidence confirms that short sentences simply do not work. They disrupt families and communities. They restrict employment opportunities and make it harder for individuals to access housing. Short-term sentencing does nothing for recidivism rates; in fact, the absolute opposite is the case. Short sentences are, therefore, not effective, and nor do they make sensible use of all-too-scarce public resources.

A Scottish Government extension of a presumption against short sentences gives us the very real opportunity to place Scotland at the forefront of introducing a transformative justice system. Karyn McCluskey, from Community Justice Scotland, has commented on the Scottish Government's new policy, saying:

"A smart justice system replaces ineffective short sentences with a problem-solving focus on addiction, mental health, poverty, social exclusion and adverse childhood experiences—and recognises prevention is better than cure."

This move by the Scottish Government has also been welcomed by the former Deputy First Minister of Scotland, Lord Wallace of Tankerness, a Liberal Democrat peer in the other place—or the upside down, as I like to call it.

**David Linden:** Careful now!

**Gavin Newlands:** I think I got away with that one.

Lord Wallace said the policy was a

"welcome and imaginative extension of the presumption against short sentences."

Former Labour First Minister, Henry McLeish, also supports the policy, saying that 60% of those who are imprisoned for three months or less are reconvicted within the year.

Therefore, this imaginative policy from the Scottish Government is not only helping to reduce our prison population, but is doing so in a way that is helping to tackle reoffending rates and transforming criminals into valuable members of society.

The UK Government's previous White Paper placed a strong emphasis on preparing prisoners for life after their sentence has come to an end and helping to support them to change their behaviour. Now, I support many of the Government's aims, such as tackling health and substance misuse issues, helping to prepare individuals for working life after prison and improving access to education and training. However, it is vital that we fund

and support projects, voluntary groups and charities that can effectively evidence the positive impact their work has on changing the lives of prisoners.

As the SNP's Westminster spokesperson for sport, and as someone who has always been involved in sport, I passionately believe that Governments of all colours should be tapping into the power of sport to help to change attitudes and behaviours. As a rugby man, I am particularly interested in the work that Saracens rugby club has done to help reduce reoffending rates. Saracens rightly point out that 70% of young offenders leaving prisons in England and Wales will reoffend within 12 months, primarily due to a lack of support and motivation, low career aspirations and not having positive role models in their lives.

The Saracens' Get Onside programme uses the power of rugby to help to improve the life chances of young people leaving the justice system. The programme is based in Feltham young offenders institution and aims to build career aspirations, to provide mentors and a link to a local sports club, and to assist in finding educational routes or employment. That will, in turn, give offenders a sense of belonging, and it surrounds them in a positive environment.

Currently, in terms of the Get Onside programme's success rate, 92% of young offenders do not return to crime, saving the Government and the taxpayer around £1 million a year. On their website, the Saracens published a quote from a participant in the programme, who said:

"The project helped to give me belief and direction and taught me that I must be true to myself to achieve."

This programme, and many like it, highlights how we can use the power of sport to produce tangible social benefits for individuals and wider society. Sport can play a positive and key role in helping to rehabilitate offenders, as well as playing an important preventive role in keeping people of all genders away from crime altogether. As such, the Government would be missing an open goal if they did not incorporate the power of sport into their wider reform agenda.

As the UK Government move forward with reforms, it is important to note that they have a responsibility to wider society by ensuring communities are safe and wrongdoers are dealt with in the appropriate manner. However, they also have a responsibility to those working in the justice system. It is a fact that the number of serious assaults on officers in Scottish prisons is 90% lower than in prisons in England and Wales, mainly due to the number of officers who are in the system because we did not cut the funding for officers.

I hope that the Minister can expand on the answer he gave me recently when I asked whether, given the increase of more than 1,300 in the prison population in England and Wales, 2,500 extra officers were enough. The answer was:

"The 2,500 target is obviously based on careful analysis of what we need in order to deliver the offender management model, which means one prison officer having a six-prisoner caseload, and it should be capable of allowing us to do so."—[*Official Report*, 12 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 453W.]

In his summing up, I would like the Minister to give a bit more information on that. Was the 2,500 figure arrived at assuming an increase of 1,300 in the population, or do a further 216 officers need to be hired, using the one in six ratio he gave me?

We all want to keep people out of prison, and that has to include adopting preventive and effective policies that tackle and help those at risk of reoffending. I can only hope that, as the UK Government move forward in this process, they will reject taking a flawed, ideologically driven approach and instead undertake an evidenced-based approach, taking on board the recommendations that the Justice Committee makes, to ensure that the English and Welsh justice systems can operate in modern and efficient manner.

2.17 pm

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): I would like to begin by congratulating the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), and the other members of the Committee on all their work and on securing today's debate. I previously served on the Committee, and it was a most valuable experience.

The Committee has repeatedly shone a spotlight on the ongoing crisis affecting much of our justice system, and its work will become even more important over the coming months, given that the Ministry of Justice budget is set to be cut by another £800 million—by 40% over the decade to 2020—making the MOJ the most cut of any Department.

Turning to today's topic, our prisons have received vast media coverage over the past year—nearly always for the wrong reasons. The word "crisis" has been used time after time as a descriptor, but it is no longer sufficient. We have warned of crisis for five years—unfortunately, crisis is the new norm. The staff holding the service together are expected to do crisis management. The truth is that our prisons are now moving beyond crisis and are approaching emergency.

Peter Clarke, the chief inspector of prisons, with whom I had the pleasure of undertaking a prison visit, described the situation in his scathing annual report:

"Last year I reported that too many of our prisons had become unacceptably violent and dangerous places. The situation has not improved—in fact, it has become worse."

He went on to warn that not one young offender institute was deemed safe, describing the "speed of decline" as "staggering". He described a Dickensian prison system with people

"locked up for as much as 23 hours a day",

which is

"compounded by staffing levels...that are...too low to keep order" or to

"run a decent regime that allows prisoners to be let out of their cells to get to training and education".

I would argue that it is the Government's policy of slashing hundreds of millions from the Prison Service budget that has driven us into the emergency room.

Perhaps the starkest example of the prisons emergency is what the Justice Committee, in its sixth report of the 2015-16 Session, described as

"the ongoing and rapid deterioration in prison safety".

It was right to do so. It is a stain on our nation that self-harm and suicides are at record levels and that assaults are up by almost 80% on 2010. Every day, 74 people are attacked in our prisons—one every 20 minutes, morning, noon and night, every single day of the year. The consequences of this violence are dire. With prisoners

[Richard Burgon]

locked near permanently in their cells to maintain safety, it is almost irrelevant whether education, training or mental health services are improved. Locked in their cells for that amount of time, they remain inaccessible, at a great cost to wider society. This violence is closely connected to another theme addressed by the Select Committee—empowering governors and prison reforms. The Government talk of a reform agenda delivering a modern prison estate fit for the 21st century and of governors self-managing their education budgets to help prisoners, but none of that will bear fruit until the epidemic of violence is tackled.

The central cause of the prisons emergency has been the loss of staff. Conservative Justice Secretaries have cut the number of frontline prison officers by almost 7,000 since 2010. New psychoactive substances, drones and phones are all serious problems in our prisons. As the POA says, staffing shortages drive the wave of violence. I welcome the fact that the Government now acknowledge the damage done by thousands of prison officer cuts and have begun to try to reverse their own cuts, but the staffing picture is not, I am afraid, as rosy as the Government seek to portray it. Despite 1,200 extra officers recruited over the past year, one in four of our prisons has still had a fall in officer numbers in the past 12 months. That includes staffing cuts at 25% of the prisons labelled as being of concern. In high-security prisons, it is even worse: half those prisons have fewer officers than they had a year ago. For all the talk of empowering governors, the number of governor-grade staff has been cut by over one third and continues to fall.

Staffing cannot be permanently resolved separately from pay. The insulting 1.7% recent pay offer was yet another real-terms pay cut—a cut of £980 per year for the average prison officer. Falling pay is one of the reasons there is an exodus of experienced officers, who are now leaving at three times the rate back in 2010. The Government's policies are creating a dangerous cocktail of experienced prisoners and inexperienced prison staff.

The motion addresses the wider restructuring of the prisons system. The Government have destabilised the prisons system through an erratic reform policy that veered first this way and then that way, while prisons were being stripped of valuable resources, both human and financial. This has not been helped by the constant chopping and changing of those at the top. I have been shadow Justice Secretary for just over 18 months, and I have already dealt with three Justice Secretaries, each with their own specific vision. One of the current Secretary of State's first tasks was to toss aside the Prisons and Courts Bill and the creation of a statutory purpose for prisons. That was especially regrettable as it had the support of virtually the whole House. Although the Government have scrapped the Bill, one thing remains the same: their answer to the deep problems in the prison service is yet more reform. I am a bit sceptical.

Concerns about how reform is being undertaken were especially well expressed by the president of the Prison Governors Association, Andrea Albutt, who decried the fact that governors have seen nothing tangible coming out of the MOJ to ease the burden to date. The PGA complains of the MOJ's prison reform programme draining resources, with expensive policy teams in Whitehall, operational experts taken out of prisons and put into

the MOJ, and competing structures that sometimes undermine accountability. In short, if real powers rest in new Whitehall teams, budgets are cut and central contracts restrict freedom of decision, governors are not in charge in the way that they should be.

Despite talk of greater autonomy, prison governors are still suffering the lack of control that arose from outsourcing key prison services to the private sector. The hiving off of facilities management and repairs has undermined basic decency in prisons. When prisoners are remarking that it is easier to get drugs than clean clothing, or when prisoners go for long periods without properly functioning showers or with a broken cell window, this does nothing to build the necessary institutional trust. It also makes reforming lives much harder. Labour has not only ruled out any more private prisons but committed to a review, working with prison governors, to identify the private maintenance and repair contracts that can be brought back in house over time, saving the state money and improving prison conditions. I heard the Chair of the Justice Committee call for an urgent review of these same contracts in Justice questions on Tuesday. Labour Members fully support his call.

The motion rightly points to our historically high prison population. Prison must act as a deterrent and, yes, as a punishment. Often prison is a fitting sanction, especially while a convicted person is a danger to the public, and a significant minority of people may never be safe to release. However, most people will one day leave prison, so it must also rehabilitate, but too often it is failing to do so. We now have 10,000 more prisoners in jails than we have proper places for. Rehabilitation cannot take place in overcrowded prisons. Armley Prison, in my home city of Leeds, holds nearly twice the number of prisoners that it was built to accommodate, and that is not an exception: the latest figures show that almost seven in 10 of our prisons are overcrowded.

As we have heard, such warehousing of people without any support or access to rehabilitation means that when they leave prison they are likely to be in the same position as when they entered—or perhaps even worse: drug-dependent, homeless and without the skills to get secure work. Their stay in prison will be too short to tackle their problems. In fact, they may come out of prison more likely to commit crime. I have been struck by the fact that nearly every time I meet a prison governor, they tell me that we are jailing too many people. They ask me why we are using vast resources to send someone to prison for a few weeks. They are frustrated at seeing the same people over and again. When people at the frontline raise such matters, we must all take them very seriously.

The evidence underlines the fact that, for far too many, prison is not working. Six in 10 adults released from prison after a sentence of less than 12 months, which over half of all prisoners receive, commit another offence within a year. The cost of reoffending has now hit £15 billion. As a society, we need to be asking if we should have jailed 8,000 women last year when the overwhelming majority committed a non-violent offence, with half in prison for theft. If prison is about rehabilitation as well as punishment, what is the point of seven in 10 women serving 12 weeks or less in jail? With a woman's prison place costing £47,000 a year, alternatives could free up valuable resources to invest in women's centres and community solutions, and to make prison work for those who really should be there.

We need to tackle the discrimination that means there is a greater disproportionality in the number of black people in our prisons than in the prisons of the United States of America. It wastes lives as well as valuable public funds. Too many prisoners, as we have heard, are suffering from mental health issues and need intensive medical treatment, not incarceration. Perhaps most immediately, we need to tackle the cases of the imprisonment for public protection prisoners. We need to debate all three issues separately in this Chamber on another occasion.

In conclusion, we have a huge amount to do to turn our prisons around and make them places where lives are transformed, so that—this is our main objective—our communities become safer places to live. After nearly a decade of failed policies that have cut our prison service to the bone, that cannot and will not be done overnight, but the ongoing scrutiny of the Justice Committee will play a valuable role in helping to make our prisons work.

2.30 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and the Justice Committee on securing the debate. I thank Members for their contributions, and I say genuinely that almost every one of today's contributions was constructive, made in good faith and had some merit to it. My hon. Friend set out with characteristic clarity many of the issues that our prisons face. As we all know, and as the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) mentioned, nearly all prisoners will one day be released, and our prisons should therefore be places that put offenders on a path that will enable them to turn away from crime after release. That means providing a safe and secure environment, and providing the right interventions and support to help them to turn their lives around.

No one doubts the challenge that we face with prisons or expects the situation to be quick or easy to turn around. I do not shy away from conceding that our prison system faces unprecedented challenges, but I am confident that we have a clear and coherent plan to face them. That plan will secure the safety and security of our estate and staff, empower governors to make decisions that are right for their prisons and ensure that we have the right tools in place to support offenders to rejoin society as productive citizens.

The hon. Members for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) and for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands)—the hon. Gentleman is no longer in his place—referred to the motion, and specifically to its mention of our “historically high prison population”. We can all agree that the prison population is too high, and we want it to fall. We have, however, made a considered judgment deliberately not to set an arbitrary target for reduction, because we will not compromise on our responsibility either to the victims of offences or to the safety of the wider public.

We will always hold in prison criminals whose offences are so grave that no other penalty will suffice, or who would pose a genuine threat to the public if they were released. The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North mentioned that the Government should have

a presumption against prison sentences of less than 12 months. Indeed, in England and Wales there is a presumption against custody at all, and a judge will send someone to prison only if they deem it right to do so.

It is important to remember that our current prison population reflects the number of serious offences—including sexual offences—that are coming before the courts. That has changed the nature of sentencing, with fewer people being sent to prison on short sentences but more people in prison for serious crimes on longer sentences. To give the House one example, there are now 4,000 more sex offenders in prison in England and Wales than there were in 2010.

I can assure the House that we will always have enough prison places for offenders who are sentenced to custody by our courts, and that protection of the public and providing justice to victims will remain our principal concern. Our latest statistics show that we have operational capacity of 87,370, and a current headroom of 1,241 places. The current population is 86,129, which includes 4,048 women prisoners. Of course, we cannot simply build our way out of the situation, but we have a plan for bringing in new capacity to the estate to provide modern, cost-effective, fit-for-purpose accommodation that will deal with the concerns that have been raised about overcrowding in the estate. HMP Berwyn currently has 800 places in use and will, when fully operational, provide 2,100 places. In addition, we have announced plans to build four more modern prisons.

**Robert Neill:** The Minister has talked about capacity, and I understand the work that is being done. A specific point that has been raised with the Select Committee is the slowness of repatriation of foreign national prisoners who are serving sentences in the UK. Repatriation of such prisoners would certainly take some pressure off capacity. Can he help on that point?

**Mr Gyimah:** The Chair of the Select Committee makes an important point about the repatriation of foreign national offenders. He will be aware that the most effective scheme to repatriate foreign offenders is the early release scheme, under which 40,000 foreign national offenders have been moved out of the UK since 2010. Prisoner transfer agreements are also in place but they are a lot more challenging because they require the co-operation of the receiving Government, who do not always seem that keen to receive their own criminals back. A cross-governmental task force is focused on that very point.

To realise our vision for prisons, we must first make sure that they are secure environments that are free from drugs, violence and intimidation. Again, I do not shy away from acknowledging that the use and availability of drugs in our prisons is too high. The House has often discussed how the rise of psychoactive substances in our prisons was a game-changer, but it was when organised criminal groups moved in to take control of supply routes into prisons that the rules changed. Those groups have embedded themselves throughout the prison estate, becoming ever more sophisticated in driving the drug market and making enormous profits from peddling misery to those around them. Their activities have been facilitated by the rise of new technologies, such as phones

[Mr Gyimah]

and drones, which they have used to try to overcome our security. Those things represent an unprecedented threat that we have not faced before.

As our prison officers and law enforcement partners across the country regularly prove, however, we are more than up to that challenge, and our investment in security is bearing fruit. Last year alone, HMPPS officers recovered more than 225 kg of drugs from the prison estate. Our new team of specialist drone investigators has already helped to secure over 50 years of jail time for those involved, and the team is supporting ongoing investigations across the country.

We are providing officers with the tools that they need. We have already introduced drug tests for psychoactive substances across all prisons, provided every prison with signal detection equipment and trained more than 300 sniffer dogs specifically to detect new psychoactive substances. The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) asked about the availability of sniffer dogs to prisons. The dogs operate on a regional basis and are therefore available for prisons to call on as and when they are needed.

We are investing heavily in security and counter-terror measures, including £25 million to create the new security directorate in HMPPS. This year we will also invest more than £14 million in transforming our intelligence, search and disruption capability at local, national and regional level, to enable us better to identify and root out those who seek to supply drugs to our prisons. That investment includes more than £3 million to establish our serious organised crime units, which will relentlessly disrupt our most subversive offenders.

We are already seeing early successes from the new capability. A recent joint Prison Service and police operation at HMP Hewell, involving our specialist search teams and dogs, recovered 323 items, including 79 mobile phones, 29 improvised weapons, 50 litres of alcohol and a large quantity of drugs.

**David Hanson:** The Minister is indicating that those things are all intelligence-led. They should be routine.

**Mr Gyimah:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but we need to know what we are looking for, and we need to identify the prisoners who are most likely to have links with organised crime. We now know that about 6,000 prisoners have links with organised crime on the outside and are conduits for drugs into our prisons, and that allows us to be far more effective in what we are doing to combat those operations. It is still very early days, but the point I am making is that we are beginning to see success. As we go forward, we intend to build on these successes, through our new drugs plan, which he mentioned, and our work on corruption, where it exists—even if it be only among a very few officers. He will be hearing more from me about that shortly.

Of course, this is not just about seizing or intercepting drugs. We should never forget that we have a duty of care to our prisoners—we want to help offenders with drug problems—and more of our prisons now have specialist wings to support them in overcoming their dependencies. We are also working closely with health partners to provide information, guidance and support to prisoners, visitors and staff on the impact and damaging consequences of drugs.

Hon. Members have mentioned the safety of our prisons. Ensuring safety is partly about having the right staffing levels to deliver safe and consistent regimes, and we are making swift progress in recruiting the additional 2,500 staff in the adult estate we promised in 2016: 1,255 extra prison officers have been recruited in the last year, and officer numbers are now at their highest levels since August 2013. In the youth estate, we have likewise expanded frontline staff capacity in public sector youth offender institutions by about 20%.

Preventing suicide and self-harm is also a focus of mine. We are taking decisive action to reduce the levels of self-harm by strengthening the frontline. Each individual incident of suicide or self-harm is one too many and a source of deep tragedy. We have introduced new suicide and self-harm prevention training to give everyone working in prisons, whether officers or staff from other organisations, the confidence and skills they need to support those in their care. So far, more than 10,000 prison staff have started the training, and all new prison officer and prison custody officer recruits now complete the programme as part of their initial training. I am glad to say that the number of self-inflicted deaths in custody is significantly down from last year, although I will be the first to admit that there is still a lot of work to be done.

The Chair of the Select Committee referred to the architecture of the prison system and how we can hold ourselves to account. We are strengthening the ability of the inspectorate to hold the Government and the Prison Service to account and have introduced a new urgent notification process, which had formed part of the original Prisons and Courts Bill, to enable the Secretary of State to be alerted directly where the chief inspector has a significant and urgent concern about the performance of an institution. We launched that process last month. The Secretary of State will be directly alerted by the chief inspector if an urgent issue needs addressing to ensure that recommendations are acted upon immediately. A new team of specialists accountable to Ministers will ensure that immediate action is taken and will respond within 28 days with a more in-depth plan to ensure sustained, long-term improvement for the prison.

**Andy Slaughter:** I hear what the Minister is saying, but a lot of it sounds like firefighting. I quoted from a report on the Scrubs earlier, but tomorrow we have Her Majesty's inspectorate's report on the Scrubs—I do not know if he has seen it yet. I have not quoted from it because it is under embargo still, but it shows endemic, long-term problems that need powerful solutions, and I just do not hear that vision coming from the Government.

**Mr Gyimah:** The hon. Gentleman is being unfair. Recruiting more staff, investing in intelligence and technology, rolling out a drugs strategy, introducing an urgent notification process, giving more power to the inspectorate—all these things will solve the issues in our prison. I hear him on the Scrubs—I admit that there are deep-seated challenges there—but prisons are, always have been and always will be difficult places to manage. That said, we are making significant investment in tackling the problems in our prisons. As I have always said, it will not happen overnight, but the actions I am outlining show our determination and will to overcome the problems and make sure that our prisons are places of safety and reform.

Hon. Members have touched on employment and education. We have recently announced the new futures network, which will be a broker between prisons and the employment sector so as to help prisoners to find work on release and get better purposeful activity in prisons. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) mentioned that sometimes drug habits develop because prisoners are bored. Having more and better purposeful activity is important to ensuring that prisoners are purposefully occupied in prison and can gain new skills and improve their chances of finding a job on release.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) rightly mentioned the estate. Yes, the plan is to create 10,000 additional places. Of course, there have been issues with maintenance, but those are issues for facilities managers, and I am in direct contact with them to ensure that, whatever the future plans for a prison further down the line, we maintain standards of decency in that prison.

In conclusion, reducing reoffending, protecting the public, reforming offenders and ensuring the safety and security of our staff and those in our custody remain my Department's top priorities.

**Robert Neill:** I appreciate the Minister's remarks and the spirit of them. Will he confirm that the Government remain committed, when a legislative opportunity occurs, to placing the powers of the inspectorate, the prisons and probation ombudsman and the national prevention mechanism on a statutory basis?

**Mr Gyimah:** I can confirm that we are very alive in looking for legislative opportunities to do exactly what my hon. Friend says. He will be aware that where there are other avenues, such as private Members' Bills—one to enable us to switch off mobile phones is going through the House now—to make practical progress, we are doing so.

We must break the ongoing cycle of reoffending that has for too long blighted communities the length of our country by helping offenders to turn their lives around and prepare them for a productive and law-abiding life on release. I will end by reiterating some of the remarks I made at the start of the debate. Reforming our prisons to be places of safety and reform will not be easy, but the House should be in no doubt about the energy and resolve with which we will continue to tackle head on the challenges that we face. I welcome many of the

points made today. They were constructive. I disagree on a number of issues with the Opposition spokesperson, but I know that we all share the same intention: to make our prisons places of safety and to ensure that when people come out of prison, they do not reoffend.

2.46 pm

**Robert Neill:** I thank my 14 Back-Bench colleagues who contributed to this debate, and I appreciate the spirit of the Minister's response. We look forward to working with him and his colleagues. He has not by any means answered all the questions raised in the debate, but that was partly a matter of time. We will need to continue to press the Government on several matters, but we look forward to doing that.

Since there is a lot of speculation today about what people have framed and put on their walls, in various contexts, perhaps I might commend something for the Minister's wall. When Thomas Mott Osborne took over responsibility for Sing Sing penitentiary in New York, he said he was going to turn the jail from a scrap heap into a repair yard. That would not be a bad thing to have on the wall of every prison governor's office and every office in NOMS and the MOJ.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House takes note of the Justice Committee's Twelfth and Fourteenth Reports of Session 2016-17, on Prison reform and the Government Responses to them; notes with concern the continuing crisis in prisons in England and Wales, with an historically high prison population and unacceptably high levels of violence, drug availability and use, disturbances and self-harm and self-inflicted deaths in the adult and youth custodial estate; further notes the critical reports by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons on individual establishments and thematic issues; welcomes the Government's intention to proceed with a programme of prison reform and to produce a prison safety and reform action plan as recommended by the Committee, and the publication of performance data on each prison from 26 October 2017; regrets the fact that the Government does not intend to bring forward legislation to establish a statutory purpose for prisons, enhance the powers of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, and place the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) and the UK's National Preventive Mechanism on a statutory basis; further regrets the Government's rejection of the Committee's recommendation that it should report at six-monthly intervals on the impact of governor empowerment on complaints made to the PPO and Independent Monitoring Boards; and calls on the Government to ensure that information on prison performance and safety is published regularly, and with sufficient detail and timeliness to enable the effective scrutiny of the management of prisons by the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service.

## UK Fishing Industry

*[Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 15 and 29 November 2017, HC 489; Second Report of Session 2017-19 from the European Scrutiny Committee, Chapter 12—Multiannual Plan for Demersal Fishing Stocks in the North Sea, HC 301-ii; Third report of Session 2017-19 from the European Scrutiny Committee, Chapter 7—EU Fisheries Control, Chapter 28—Fisheries Discard Plans and Chapter 8—Fisheries catch quotas for 2018, HC 301-iii.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Before I call the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) to move the motion, let me say that it will be obvious to the House that a great many Members wish to speak, and there is limited time, so there will be an immediate limit on Back-Bench speeches of five minutes after the hon. Lady's speech.

2.48 pm

**Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK fishing industry.

It is a tradition that MPs debate the UK fishing industry at the beginning of December. Such debates give us the opportunity not only to raise matters relating to the UK industry as a whole, but to reflect on proposals for the following year's total allowable catch, which are discussed at the December Council of Ministers. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for this very important debate, and for holding it in the Chamber, because we have on occasions had this debate in Westminster Hall.

Fishing is a dangerous practice, and my thoughts are with the fishermen and their families who have suffered loss and injury during the past year. I thank those in the rescue services, including the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the coastguards and National Coastwatch Institution volunteers, for their selfless service to sea rescue. I also thank the Fishermen's Mission and the Apostleship of the Sea for their work to support fishermen and their families at times of hardship.

The result of the EU referendum was well received by our fisher folk. Whoever I speak to says that they view the future with optimism. Indeed, Toms boatyard in my constituency informs me that it has many orders for vessels on its books. We have heard the Minister and the Secretary of State confirm on numerous occasions that, at the end of March 2019, the UK will leave the common fisheries policy. As a result, the Minister will be able to make decisions about the marine environment and catches of species without attending the meeting in Brussels and haggling with 27 other member states.

**Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab):** Will the hon. Lady reaffirm that, on the day we leave the EU, there will be no more negotiations and no more trading off, and that we will be out of the common fisheries policy so that we can decide for ourselves how we co-operate with other countries over our fishing? Will we take back control of our fishing on the day we leave?

**Mrs Murray:** As far as I am aware, when we leave the EU, we leave the common fisheries policy.

The UK has given notice that it will withdraw from the 1964 London convention, which gave some nations restricted access to the 12-mile limit. The UK 200-mile or median line limit is prescribed in the Fisheries Limits Act 1976 but, once we leave, the rules for the management and conservation of fish stocks, and indeed the amount of fish that can be taken, will be governed by the UN convention on the law of the sea, particularly articles 61 to 63. There is a clear distinction between UNCLOS and the CFP in as much as the UK will be free from the principle of equal access to a common resource on which the CFP is based.

**Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend accept that that will allow us to manage better our sea bass stocks for both commercial and recreational fishermen?

**Mrs Murray:** I thank my hon. Friend, who will be interested to know that I will come on to that point.

It might be worth considering UNCLOS in more detail. Article 61 says we must be responsible for setting conservation measures, taking account of the scientific information available. Such information often comes from the well-respected International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, with which the UK scientific body the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science works.

In short, article 62 states that the coastal state—in our case, the UK—shall set the amount of fish that can be taken in our exclusive economic zone and determine whether our fleet can catch it all. If it cannot, we can offer the surplus to other nations, which must comply with any conservation measures that we have set. Interestingly, paragraph 4(h) of article 62 says that the coastal state can set laws concerning

“the landing of all or any part of the catch by such vessels in the ports of the coastal State”.

It is worth noting that, in some instances, that could have a real economic benefit to the UK. Article 63 says that when a stock occurs in an adjacent EEZ, each coastal state shall work together to set conservation measures.

Zonal attachment is used by many nations to manage their fish stocks while ensuring economic benefit to the coastal state. A good example of zonal attachment is that of a farmer harvesting crops in his fields who does not invite his neighbours to come in and take those crops free of charge. According to a report by the University of the Highlands and Islands in 2016, EU boats overall landed 10 times more fish and shellfish—six times more by value—from the UK EEZ than UK boats did from the EU EEZ. For most individual member states, the imbalance was even greater. Iceland retains about 90% of the benefit from its fisheries in its attached zones, while the figure for Norway is 84%. In contrast, the UK secures a mere 40%, which can be attributed to the common fisheries policy. We give away—free to other nations—60% of the fish in our zone.

Has the Minister ensured that the historical catch data from all EU vessels that have fished in the UK EEZ has been collected? That could provide the basis for increased benefit in the UK zone once we leave the European Union. While any surplus quota that we are unable to utilise could be offered to other member states,

meaning that some economic gain for the UK might be obtained, we must make sure that UK fishermen come first.

A significant central feature of moving towards fishing our zonally attached fish will be increased catching opportunity. Once achieved, that opens up the happy possibility of managing fisheries innovatively, looking to optimise benefit for our nation and its communities across the seafood supply chain. The range of options is huge, and can be properly discussed once the enabling opportunity is secured. In the words of Bertie Armstrong, chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation:

"don't stress over choosing the wallpaper before we've bought the flat."

Let me turn to effort control in place of quota. Under the CFP we have a management system that comprises quotas and effort control in the form of kilowatt days. Will the Minister confirm that once we withdraw from the CFP, he will move away from that confusing system of fisheries management and put in place a something simpler? Many fishermen I have spoken to are not in favour of a days-at-sea scheme, but that warrants further investigation. Has the Minister spoken to his counterpart in the Faroe Islands, which operate a days-at-sea system, to find out how their management system works? Has he asked for the views of CEFAS on the days-at-sea scheme versus the use of quota?

Many inshore fishermen have expressed concern about access to the UK's six and 12-mile limit by other member states fishing for certain species. There appears to have been disproportionate access to those limits for more than 40 years, and that must stop. A lot of inshore vessels are unable to migrate and have found themselves competing with many larger vessels from other nations in the same waters. Will the Minister give due thought to exclusive access for small UK fishermen to our 12-mile limit when considering any post-CFP management regime?

Turning to this year's Council of Ministers meeting, it appears that an uplift of total allowable catch is proposed for a number of species. As a consequence, the available quota for the UK fleet will increase. It is also heartening to know that the serious uplift of opportunities that arose from the EU-Norway talks has resulted in better quotas. However, in areas VIId and VIIe off the south-west coast, I am surprised that the quota for Dover sole has not followed ICES recommendations. The uplift of quota proposed by the Commission is less than scientists have suggested. The South West Fish Producers Organisation has also expressed concern about sprat stocks in that area.

ICES advice still points to the bass stock being outside safe biological limits—that issue was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker)—and I have two concerns about bass stock. My constituent, Mr Chris Newman, contacted me last August after hauling in his trawl to find around 1,000 kg of bass. The bass was in abundance at the time because it swims with mackerel, and I had already heard that there was an abundance of mackerel locally. Because of how bass management currently works, Mr Newman would have had to catch 33 tonnes of species to legally land his bass, so he ended up having to discard much of it. That is disgraceful, not only because he was denied around £10,000 of income, but because much of that bass would not have survived once it was discarded.

It has been reported on social media this week that another fisherman in Plymouth was denied a similar income because he had to discard bass that he was prevented from landing. When will the EU realise that fish cannot be told not to swim into a trawl? The Secretary of State has described EU bass management as a "blunt management system". Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that our post-CFP management of fisheries will be flexible enough to prevent such situations by invoking emergency measures?

Secondly with regard to bass, I want to make a point on behalf of recreational sea anglers. They have been allowed to keep a single bass from each year's angling. It appears that, if implemented, the European Commission's proposal for 2018 will prohibit a recreational hook-and-line bass angler from taking a single bass for the entire year for personal or family consumption. That is unacceptable and I ask the Minister to make representations at the Council of Ministers in support of those recreational fishers. A lot of young people go angling, and many of them would not recognise if they had a bass on the end of their line. How will we police that?

**Mr Charles Walker:** It is simply madness to suggest that someone in a west end restaurant can sit down to eat wild bass caught by a commercial fisherman, but that one of my hon. Friend's constituents, or one of my constituents on a day out at the beach, cannot keep a single fish that they catch off the beach or on a boat. That is simply not tenable.

**Mrs Murray:** I take a different view. I think that there is a place for commercial fishermen and recreational sea anglers to work together with us. A lot of people who go into a restaurant and think they are buying British bass are actually ordering farmed bass that has been imported from abroad. We need to make sure that we have a flexible management system that accommodates everybody.

I would describe any possible transition period after March 2019 as a bridge. Nine months is all that is needed at the very most. Looking forward to December 2018, assuming that we get a satisfactory trade deal, will the Minister make it clear at the Fisheries Council negotiations that the UK will be introducing its own management system from 1 January 2020 at the very latest? After all, the necessary processes and coastal state arrangements already exist. We can ensure, from that date, that zonal attachment of fisheries will apply to the UK, as it does to many other nations around the world.

Many people have raised concerns about whether we could enforce any UK-set rules on fisheries, including on access. Will the Minister confirm that the UK already polices our 200-mile limit under the CFP using different tools? Fisheries protection vessels from the Royal Navy for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the inshore fisheries and conservation authorities, and the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency are all at sea making sure that the rules are enforced. Other enforcement tools include the electronic vessel monitoring equipment on board many vessels and observation aircraft. The UK will continue to enforce any rules it sets after we leave the CFP, as we have done for years.

I would like to raise briefly the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 and the Factortame case. Will the Minister confirm that we will be able to redo our economic links,

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

unfettered by that EU ruling? Nobody else permits foreign rights to national resources and assets to the degree the UK was forced into.

Finally, fishermen have always felt that their industry was sacrificed when we joined the European Economic Community. It is therefore necessary that we have a separation of catching opportunity/access, and access to the EU market. Those are separate subjects. Norway never let them be mixed. Indeed, there is no international precedent or supporting economic reasoning for doing that. For example, if France wants to sell us its wine and cheese, it must buy our fish. That is common sense. Will the Minister confirm that he will not sacrifice access to fishing resources for access to markets in any negotiation?

I wish my hon. Friend the Minister well in his negotiation next week. I know that he, like me, knows how important fisheries are to our coastal communities and that, like me, he is optimistic for the opportunities our fishermen will have after we leave the common fisheries policy.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. As I said earlier, there will now be a time limit of five minutes on Back-Bench speeches.

3.4 pm

**Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab):** May I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) about marine safety organisations and fishermen's welfare organisations? I am thinking particularly of the Fishermen's Mission, in a year which, thankfully, has been one of the better ones in terms of fatalities at sea.

I do not know whether you have had an opportunity to watch the wonderful BBC series "Blue Planet II", Madam Deputy Speaker. If you have, you will have been inspired and moved by the wondrousness of our marine environment, but also by its vulnerability and fragility. While environmental degradation on land is visible to us—we see forests and species disappear, and we see desertification—what has been happening in our oceans for far too long has remained invisible to all except a dedicated band of marine scientists and divers, but now, thanks to that fantastic programme, it is there for all of us to see.

**Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab):** When my right hon. Friend watched that programme, was he as concerned as I was by the amount of plastic being ingested by some of the marine life that later goes into our food chain?

**Mr Bradshaw:** Indeed I was. Thankfully, plastics are one of the more visible aspects of marine pollution, because we see them washed up on our beaches and the Government are taking action, but a great deal else that goes on is still invisible.

There is another big difference between land-based and sea-based environmental degradation. The sea is a place where the ancient human activity of hunting and gathering continues, and continues apace. As has just been pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), other human activity, such as the use of plastics, has its impacts, but much of it is invisible. Man-made climate change is leading to

the warming and acidification of our oceans, with yet unknown consequences. It does not affect just marine life—including fish, as an edible resource—but the roles that the oceans themselves play in regulating our climate, our oxygen levels, and basically everything that makes human life on earth possible.

For most of human history, oceans and fish were simply plundered. That did not matter when there were relatively few human beings and fishing technology was relatively antiquated, but in the last 100 years or so, population growth and technological progress have completely changed that equation, with, in some instances, devastating consequences. We all know the story of the near eradication of bluefin tuna, turtles, cod off the north-east coast of the United States, and, in our own case, cod in the North sea. However, things have changed. Because of what was going on in the early noughties, politicians began to take notice and take action. There was collective endeavour, and it has worked. North sea cod has made a fantastic recovery, thanks to the difficult measures and decisions that I took as a fisheries Minister, which were massively criticised by the fishing industry at the time. There has even been progress on the high seas, which is much more difficult because of the lack of an international legal framework.

As anyone—I hope—can appreciate, managing our seas and fish stocks sustainably demands that countries work together. As has been said so often during our debates over the years, fish do not respect national borders; they swim about. Unlike the hon. Member for South East Cornwall, I have real concerns about the potential of Brexit to reverse the welcome progress that we have seen in the last 15 or 20 years. Let us be honest: the status quo is not a disaster. The hon. Lady herself spoke of recommendations for increased catches at this year's meeting of the Council of Ministers. I wonder why that is the case. My local ports, Brixham and Plymouth, have just reported their best years in terms of the value of their catches. Species such as cuttlefish are doing incredibly well, and are being exported straight to markets in Italy, France and Spain. Our crab and lobster are also valuable exports.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray:** Is the right hon. Gentleman seriously saying that British fishermen want to stay in the common fisheries policy?

**Mr Bradshaw:** Some do, but they tend to be quiet, because they are shouted down by Members of Parliament like the hon. Lady. If she has honest conversations with sensible fishermen who care about the long-term sustainability of their stocks, she will find that not all of them share her views, and it would be inaccurate to suggest that they do.

As I was saying, some of our most valuable catches—and we in the south-west have enjoyed a record year in that regard—are exported straight to the markets of the European Union, tariff-free, while we are in the common fisheries policy. As a nation, we also depend on imports for 80% of what we consume, because of our taste for cod and haddock. So what will happen in the event of a bad deal or no deal, in terms of tariffs on these vital exports and the vital imports on which our producing and processing sector depend, and about which my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby will speak later?

The Brexiteers have sold the idea that if we leave the EU and unilaterally declare these marvellous limits, our fishers will suddenly get all these extra fish and massively increased quotas, our boats, which currently fish in other people's waters, will be able to carry on regardless, and our vital exports will be completely unaffected. Like so many of the promises made by these modern-day wreckers, this is a cruel deception on our fishers and their communities. We need only look at the problems we have had this week with the Irish land border; imagine what will happen if, as the Brexiteers are proposing, the UK suddenly and unilaterally moves the international marine borders, and, in effect, declares fish wars on all our neighbours, excluding them from fishing grounds they have fished for hundreds of years and stealing the quota they consider legally theirs. It is a recipe for mayhem.

It is also a recipe for environmental disaster. We know from fisheries management all around the world that if international and supranational co-operation and collaboration break down, it is the fish and the marine environment that pay the price. The second cruel deception being played out is the suggestion that the Government are likely to make fisheries a priority. We need only look at our fishing industry's value to our economy, compared with financial services, pharma and others. Are our Government honestly going to pick a political fight for fisheries, when all these other sectors are worth more to our economy? It is a cruel deception.

I have two further points. First, I ask the Minister to make bass a recreational stock, as Ireland has done, with huge success. I also ask the Minister to keep a place at that negotiating table, and when he goes to Brussels later this month, I ask him to stick with the science: stick with the evidence, and think about the fish and their future, and a healthy future for our fishing industry.

3.12 pm

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) for initiating it. I know of her great experience in the fishing industry. As she, above all others, will know from her personal loss from fishing, safety at sea is paramount. I pay tribute to her.

We look forward to our very able Fisheries Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), going to the December Council and coming back full of fish, and making sure that we have sufficient quota for our fishermen, because there is the science now to be able to say that for most quotaed species there are enough there for our fishermen to catch.

I am amazed that the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) is so pessimistic about the common fisheries policy. Whether we were a Brexiteer or a remainer, I think we can all accept that the one section of society that got well and truly stitched up when we first went into the Common Market was the fishing industry, because it put forward quotas that were reasonably accurate, while others put forward quotas that were not, and we landed up with a very small supply of what were potentially our own fish.

**Mr Bradshaw:** I completely agree: I think we were stuffed—is that parliamentary language?—when we joined. But I am not pessimistic about the common fisheries policy;

I am realistic, and the hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that in the last 15 to 20 years, since we undertook these reforms, the picture has been improving.

**Neil Parish:** I accept that there have been improvements to the common fisheries policy, but there were many improvements to be made. We are getting on now to having discards banned from the common fisheries policy, which we as a nation can work on much better. We can also use a fishing management system similar to that of the Norwegians, where we can shut down an overfished area very quickly; they can do it within a day, whereas it is impossible to move that fast when there are 27 countries trying to come to an agreement. There are great opportunities to be had. There is no doubt—there are figures to prove it—that the European fishing vessels take from our waters some £530 million-worth of fish and we take about £110 million-worth of fish from their waters, so whichever way we look at it, there will be benefits for our fishermen.

**Mr Charles Walker:** As Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, will my hon. Friend look at the suggestion made by the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) about making bass a recreational species only? Will he and his Committee look into that?

**Neil Parish:** As Chairman of the Committee, I would be delighted to look at that. We look at all the evidence and look at exactly what can be done. There is a real place for recreational fishing, just as there is also very much a place for professional fishing. I would be very happy to look into that matter.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): As part of the study that the hon. Gentleman has agreed to undertake, will he look at the value to coastal towns of recreational fishing? In 2012, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimated that it was £2 billion a year. My angling shops, my coastal bed and breakfasts and my hotels all benefit from bass fishing, but the moratorium on anglers taking sea bass is a disaster for coastal towns.

**Neil Parish:** I actually believe that, as we come out of the common fisheries policy, there will be enough fish for everybody. If we manage the fish stocks much better, we will have every opportunity. We need to make much more of the fish that we catch, not only in the area of recreational fishing but in areas such as fish processing. I believe that we will have greater access to fish and be able to land much more of our fish on to our own shores, but when we do that, we must ensure that we process it and add value to it. We must also—dare I say it—say to all our population that we eat many types of fish when we go to the continent and to other parts of the world that we will not eat here. That is key, because we still have a huge market. Some 70% to 80% of the fish we land in the west of England is exported to France, Spain and across the rest of Europe. Those markets are very important, so we need to ensure that we get the fish, manage the fish stocks and market the fish.

On the question of Brexit and the common fisheries policy, we have a moment now, as we negotiate, when we have very positive cards in our hand. We can say to our neighbours, "There are historical arrangements that

[Neil Parish]

we will look at, but at the end of the day, you will fish the amount that we agree under our rules, and that is the way it will be.” If we are absolutely firm with them—I expect the Minister to be exactly that—we can get a reasonable deal with our neighbours. I think our neighbours will deal with us in a fair way on this issue because, to be absolutely blunt, they have two choices. They can have the fish under our rules or they will not have the fish at all.

I want to reinforce the point that we must not negotiate away our fisheries again. Our fishermen did not forgive us when we did that the first time round. If we do it a second time, they will never forgive us. This is not just about our fishermen and what percentage of the overall economic benefit comes from fish; it is also about what is morally right and wrong. This is something that we can now put right. I am convinced that this can work, with the right policies in place. I suspect that the Minister is minded to keep a lot of our existing systems of catching through quota in place. Let us have evolution, not a revolution.

On discards, let us ensure that we land everything that we catch, so that we know exactly what the stocks are. Let us also look at which types of fish will recover if we put them back into the sea. Let us have a smart system of managing our stocks. I believe that we will do well in the future. We can manage our fishing better, and we must ensure that we police our waters as we leave the common fisheries policy.

3.19 pm

**Mr Alan Campbell** (Tynemouth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) to her role on the Front Bench. She will be a strong voice for fishing and fishing communities.

In view of the frankly ludicrously short time available for this debate, I intend to keep my remarks brief and my points very local. My first point is about the continued availability of funding for infrastructure repair. North Shields port is the premier fishing port on the east coast and the biggest prawn port in England, landing around £7 million-worth of catch every year and sustaining around 300 jobs, but a recent report on the condition of the quay found that between £6 million and £8 million is needed for infrastructure repair. On 1 December, the projection jetty—an important part of the port where many boats are moored—was closed, and there is a real dilemma for those who make repairs. Does the North Shields Fish Quay make a bid? As a private company, it would be able to access only 50% of the funding from the European maritime and fisheries funds. Does the Port of Tyne do it? It can potentially access more funding but, like most trust ports around the country, it is not a small or medium-sized enterprise, so it does not fit into that category. We are therefore left scratching our heads as to where the money will come from, and fishermen are being prevented from going about their daily business. I wrote to the Minister earlier this week, and I hope that he will read of our concerns and ask his Department or, perhaps, the Marine Management Organisation to look into them, because getting an outcome and finding funding is urgent. In life after the common fisheries policy, will resources for infrastructure funding remain in place as they are now, because it is important to ports such as North Shields?

As for what post-CFP will look like, different areas will have different priorities. As I have said, North Shields is the biggest prawn port and therefore has an inshore fleet and a 12-mile limit is crucial, but it would suffice. Frankly, a 200-mile exclusive economic zone really is not relevant when, I am told, perhaps only one or two foreign vessels a year may fish those areas. Local fishermen are not particular exercised about that. North Shields has the biggest prawn port exports, with 95% of the prawns being exported. They are not processed or frozen; there are five days between them being caught and being put on tables, which are usually in European Union member states. Lorries cannot afford to wait at a hard border, and we cannot afford to have tariffs. The MMO currently issues around 300 catch certificates a year for exports to non-EU countries. If a certificate is required for every single lorry that goes to France, Spain or Italy, an estimated 21,000 certificates would be necessary, which would be a disaster for North Shields. What is the point of catching all that fish if there are no accessible markets? What is the Minister’s plan? What arrangements will be in place after we exit the CFP?

As for the salmon drift net fishery, there are only about a dozen licences on the north-east coast. They are being phased out, and that decision is based on evidence that is at least questionable because some of our rivers in Northumberland have had salmon runs for the first time in many years. We were previously told that licences needed to be phased out because the EU wanted to make them part of the whole sustainability issue, but the pressure does not come from the EU; it comes from landowners who want to protect their fishing rights to ensure that they get their share of the catches, because it is a big business. Post-CFP, will the Minister stand up to the landowners’ lobby? The fishermen in the heritages fisheries have enormous respect for the environment and a fantastic record of restocking our rivers, and it is in the interests of the fisheries that the fishermen’s interests are looked after.

In the seconds I have remaining, I invite all Members to come to see our new memorial to fishermen lost at sea, Fiddler’s Green, which was unveiled in September by Julie Myhill, the partner of James Noble—the most recent fisherman to lose his life. It reminds us that fishing is a dangerous job, and every policy maker must have that at the forefront of their mind.

3.24 pm

**Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): I am delighted to be called to speak in this important debate. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), my constituency neighbour, on securing the debate.

First and foremost, as we leave the European Union, there are massive opportunities for our fishing industry to establish itself once again as functioning, economic and viable. Repatriation of our historical territorial fishing areas will give coastal communities such as mine a completely new lease of life. The UK must ensure full and absolute control of the UK’s 200-mile territory, up to the median lines, with fishing opportunities, access and regulatory regimes controlled once again by the UK Government.

Many people may ask what that will look like. I have been slightly sceptical about the days-at-sea proposal since examining the trial initiated by my right hon.

Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) back in 2011. I had concerns about overfishing, about the targeting of species close to the shore and about a lack of scientific data against which to measure catches. However, I recently had a meeting with Fishing for Leave and saw its proposals for excluding travel time to fishing destinations, including net soak time to measure catch effort, and for recording scientific data on which to measure this resource. These proposals would end the senseless discards that we have seen under the failed quota system implemented by the European Union.

In my remaining time, I will address a specific proposal from ICES on fishing for the dicentrarchus labrax—the European sea bass—that has caused consternation among my recreational sea anglers and among sea anglers across the UK. Although I recognise its latest statistics on the continued decline in the biomass of the stock and further recognise that something needs to be done, it should not be done on the back of the rod-and-line angler. As a member of the all-party angling group and a champion of the sea bass in Parliament, I recently had the pleasure of leading a delegation to Cornwall to fish for bass. We were hosted by a chap called Nick, who runs a successful family business called Bass Go Deeper. We had a successful trip, and all the fish were returned to the sea—catch and release. Nick, like many other bass guides in Cornwall and other hook-and-line beach and cliff anglers, will no longer be able to fish if the ridiculous and draconian proposals from ICES are implemented.

The suggestion is that anglers will be able to catch fish for catch and release for only six months of the year. They will not be able to target bass at all for the other six months of the year. If the proposals are truly meant for conservation, the angler is once again being penalised by comparison with the hook-and-line commercial fisheries that can effectively land 4 tonnes of catch each.

Sport fishing in the UK is a lucrative and growing business. Businesses like Nick's will go to the wall if these proposals are implemented. The recreational sea angling sector, which has had the least impact on fish mortality, will bear a disproportionate burden of last year's negotiations, with a zero catch from January to June and a one-fish bag limit from July to September. The impact of recreational sea angling on bass stocks is negligible, which demonstrates that the problem does not rest with the sea angler. That is why I support the campaign of the Angling Trust, the Save Our Sea Bass campaign and the European Anglers Alliance to stop these completely unfair and unenforceable proposals. Banning the public from fishing for a species recreationally while letting commercial hook-and-line fisheries continue is unjust and cannot be allowed.

As the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) has already said, Ireland and America have both embraced a recreational bass fishery and are seen as premium sport fishery areas.

Catching a fish and keeping it for the pot is not a crime. Catching a fish and cooking it for dinner is one of the last great remaining hunter-gatherer pursuits in this country. The Minister should fight for anglers and oppose these ridiculous measures, which would sink a fine pursuit and a fledgling industry. There are thousands of anglers out there who are looking for his support this year.

3.29 pm

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to take part in this most important debate. I apologise to the House now, as I did to your predecessor in the Chair, for the fact that, unfortunately, I will not be here at the conclusion of the debate. I am very aware that I will shortly be travelling towards Storm Caroline, and it is worth pausing for a second, as we debate in the relative calm of Westminster on a Thursday afternoon, to reflect that many of the fishermen in my constituency will be at sea in those conditions. It is worth remembering that they do a very difficult job in very dangerous circumstances, which is why we should be grateful to them for the work they do and to organisations such as the Coastguard, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Fishermen's Mission and others that do so much to support them.

It strikes me that this may be a small piece of history, as this is perhaps the last of these fisheries debates we will have in their current form. This time next year, we will be looking towards the final Fisheries Council in which we will part of the EU, which brings me to my first ask. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the Shetland Fisherman's Association have both made it clear that they see it as obvious that for the first three months of 2019 we will remain part of the common fisheries policy but thereafter they seek bridging arrangements that will take them to end of the year, so that they might honour the arrangements that are made at the December Fisheries Council next year. That would then be the point at which we would properly exit the CFP. There is an elegant simplicity to that arrangement, and I hope that the Minister will confirm that that is the approach the Government will seek to pursue.

Fisheries management cannot continue as part of the CFP during any transitional period that follows after the end of March 2019 for one simple reason: we will not have a seat at the table when the decisions are made at the December Fisheries Council. I put that point to the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's questions earlier this year, but she was less than clear in her answer—I realise that she perhaps does not have the background in fisheries of the Minister at the Dispatch Box today. I hope that he can confirm that that is the position and the Government will not leave us in a situation where our fishing industry is left having to abide by rules and decisions of which we have had no part in the making.

As the Shetland Fishermen's Association put it to me in its briefing for today,

“water and markets don't mix”.

By that, it makes the point that the fishing industry and the fishing rights should not be traded off against other sectors. When it comes to the negotiations around our departure, will the Minister confirm that he will do as I have urged him on other occasions and ring-fence the fishing industry? There are plenty of good historical reasons why that should be done. No other coastal state is forced to trade access to waters for access to markets, and I say to the Minister that the fishermen in my constituency would see any arrangement of that sort as nothing short of a betrayal of the undertakings given to them at the time when they voted in the EU referendum.

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

Of course we will remain subject to a variety of different concerns as the Brexit process continues. We need to address the question of markets, because we can catch as many fish as we like but we have to be able to sell them to somewhere, so we will take a close interest in that part of the negotiations. We also need to address the issue of employment for crew members, some of whom come from within the EU, with many then working in the processing sector. That is where certainty needs to be given to the industry as early as possible. It simply is not going to work if we are left in the same position with crew members coming from outside the UK as we are currently left with visas for fishing crew coming from outwith the EU.

3.34 pm

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on securing it. I associate myself with pretty much all of her comments, particularly those on the emergency and rescue services, which the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) also mentioned.

I want to express my gratitude to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland for his guarantee during Scottish questions yesterday that when we leave the EU we will leave the common fisheries policy. In turn, I want to be as helpful as possible to Ministers, but I am sure that the Minister will understand that I cannot and will not vote for any fisheries Bill or Brexit deal that does not advance the interests of the fishermen in my constituency.

I will talk more about Brexit later, because first I want to discuss a matter that needs urgent attention and about which we have already spoken to the Immigration Minister—namely, non-European economic area crew on the Scottish fleet. We are not talking about unskilled labour, which is often the perception; we are talking about fishermen who are experienced and qualified professionals. Like farming, with which I grew up, I think that fishing is a trade for which people need passion to make a real go of it. Also like farming, I think that it is something that people need to be born into. It is certainly something that many fishermen are born into, whether they happen to have been born in the coastal communities of Peterhead, Fraserburgh or Macduff in my constituency or, indeed, in the Philippines or further afield.

The industry recognises the need for a transition, so that it can be sustainable with regard to local labour, but that will take time, mainly because we need to undo the decades of damage done by top-down EU policies such as the CFP. It would be helpful and welcome if the Government would start by at least recognising the Scottish fleet's need for non-EEA crew.

Of course, the Scottish fishing industry will be affected by Brexit. It is important that we agree how fisheries will be managed when we leave the CFP, and we will have those discussions when the fisheries Bill reaches the House. In the meantime, the key focus must be that we do take back control.

The Brexit negotiations are not the final negotiation for fishing. When we leave the EU, the United Kingdom will become an independent coastal state, so we must

start thinking like one in our approach to future Brexit negotiations and in our annual negotiations with the other coastal states. As has been said, the December 2018 deal will apply to the UK only up until the end of March 2019. Like others, I am in favour of going into the 2018 discussions willing to accept a nine-month bridge to the end of 2019, but only if our own requirements are met. In the Brexit negotiations, we must not bargain away any concession of access to our waters. We are not talking about building a wall in the sea to keep out all foreign boats, but if we cannot restrict access to our waters and our demands are not met, we will end up with the weakest bargaining power of any independent state.

My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall has mentioned the importance of zonal attachment. Aligning our fishing opportunities with zonal attachment involves two things—an increase of net inward quota exchanges, which we can negotiate annually, and making adjustments to the fixed quota shares, which is a longer-term process—but we cannot insist on either of them without being able to offer in return quota that the EU wants and periodic access to our waters. I reiterate that that access must be in our control and must not be traded away during Brexit negotiations.

Finally, in the short time I have left, I want to address devolution. I agree that those closest to the resource must have the most say and influence. We need grassroots policy making, not a top-down system like the CFP. I seek an assurance from the Minister that a UK framework, which is universally recognised as being required, will be developed between Westminster and the devolved Administrations and, more importantly, with the involvement of the relevant fish producer organisations.

3.39 pm

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): We have heard many times this afternoon about the importance of the fishing industry and the role it plays in the economic life of our coastal communities, including my Argyll and Bute constituency, where the industry—including the hugely significant shellfish industry—is one of the mainstays of our local economy. So I have a keen interest in the health and wellbeing and sustainability of the fishing industry and the seas that provide some of the finest seafood in the world.

It is easy to talk about the Scottish fishing industry as though it is one entity, but of course there are vast differences between the west and east coasts of Scotland. I want to highlight some of the challenges facing boat owners and skippers on the west coast.

What I am about to say will come as no great surprise, I suspect, as it is an issue that I have raised several times in my two and a half years in this place. I seek a relaxation of the Home Office rules to allow non-EEA crew members to work on vessels operating inside the 12-mile limit on the west coast. Unlike the east coast, where 12 miles is 12 miles, for the west coast's islands and coastline, the 12 miles extends a vast distance out into the Atlantic—a distance that few inshore vessels can or will travel before reaching international waters. All vessels inside that limit have to be crewed by UK or EU citizens. In the current climate, recruiting EU nationals to crew the boats is becoming increasingly problematic. More than ever, we need to employ non-EEA crew to fill the gap.

In 2015 and again in 2016, I joined a delegation of Northern Irish and west of Scotland boat owners, skippers, fish processors and Members to the Home Office to ask it to relax the ban on international seafarers being permitted to work in west coast Scottish waters. On both occasions, our appeals were rejected. We were told, "Use EU or UK crew."

I am now hearing from skippers in Oban, including Jonathan McAllister, that because of Brexit and the reluctance of EU nationals to commit to working on the boats, an already dire recruitment situation is in danger of becoming catastrophic. He and many of his colleagues are now seriously contemplating walking away from the industry.

I understand that a more constructive meeting was recently held with the Home Office. I sincerely hope that the Minister for Immigration gave a flicker of encouragement that a solution could be found; otherwise the west of Scotland fishing community will be facing the perfect storm, being unable to attract our valued EU citizens because of Brexit, while being barred from recruiting international seafarers from non-EEA countries.

I cannot overstate just how serious the recruitment problems are on the west coast. Just as we need EU nationals to work in our schools, our hospitals, our high-tech industries and our fields, so we need them to work on our seas. We also need those highly trained, professional non-EEA international seafarers to fill the gaps in our fishing fleet. I hope that the Minister does what his predecessors singularly failed to do and comes up with a long-lasting solution to the problems on the west coast.

We have heard much about the deficiencies of the common fisheries policy. I will not defend the CFP, but the SNP has for the past 40 years been resolute in its criticism of it. I think it right to say that the SNP has been the only party that has been consistently and vocally opposed to the CFP. When back in 1983 the poster girl for the Brexiteers, Margaret Thatcher, was helping to create the CFP, it was left to Donald Stewart, the leader of the SNP, to speak against it. I can understand why that history makes Conservative Members uncomfortable.

I look forward to the day when an independent Scotland, as a member of the European Union, is able to help to shape a common fisheries policy that works for Scotland and all our neighbours.

3.44 pm

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on securing this debate.

Although we have such an event each December, this particular debate stands apart from those that have been held in the past 40 years. These debates normally focus on putting steel in the Minister's backbone ahead of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting. This year, as well as having that immediate task to perform, the Minister and the Secretary of State have before them a great opportunity, with the White Paper and the fishing Bill, to reset the framework within which this great industry operates. This provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rejuvenate the East Anglian fishing industry, with Lowestoft in my constituency at its hub.

Lowestoft used to be the fishing capital of the southern North sea, but it has lost this title over the past 40 years, and East Anglia currently derives very little economic benefit from the fish stocks on its own doorstep, which are among the richest in Europe. The fisheries Bill must provide the policy framework within which the East Anglian industry can be revitalised. That means East Anglian boats having fair and equitable access to fisheries in all UK waters, but particularly the southern North sea. It requires supporting local infrastructure to be developed so that local communities and local people fully benefit from the fish that are landed in their ports. It needs a fisheries management system to be put in place in which local fishermen, scientists and the authorities collaborate in overseeing fisheries—a system that not only provides those working in the industry with a reasonable living, but ensures that the fisheries are passed on to the next generation in a better state.

At present, the East Anglian fleet is largely made up of under-10 metre boats that have access to a limited amount of fish to catch. This inequity and imbalance must be addressed. With the EU fleet today taking around four times more fish from UK waters than UK vessels take from EU waters, our departure from the EU means that it is likely that more fish will be available for UK fishermen to catch. But that will be of no benefit if we retain the existing system of allocation. The inshore fleet—the under-10s—need a fairer and larger slice of the cake. If the quota system is to be retained, there must be a significant reallocation.

It has been suggested that producer organisations will have a key role to play. If this is to be the case, the system needs to be reconstituted, as the Lowestoft PO has only six vessels, none of which lands fish in Lowestoft. There is some debate as to whether we should move to a new system of effort control, based on days at sea. If this is to be looked at again, Lowestoft could be a suitable pilot with the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, which is based in the town, monitoring its impact.

To ensure that local people and businesses benefit from more fish being landed in Lowestoft than in other East Anglian ports, it is necessary to upgrade the local supporting infrastructure. This means safe berths and better landing points, and modern markets and upgraded freezer facilities. It involves strengthening the supply chain and providing new job opportunities for boat builders, repairers, chandlers, engineers, smokeries, merchants and mongers. June Mummery and Paul Lines, representing the local industry, have already met the Minister to outline their plans for securing this investment. I anticipate that it will be worked up locally in the coming months, and I will keep the Minister informed of progress, and seek his guidance and assistance where necessary.

The current fisheries management system must be overhauled. We must move away from the current policing system to a collaborative approach involving fishermen, authorities and scientists. With CEFAS in Lowestoft, there is the potential to put in place on the East Anglian coast a new science-based, sustainable fishing system that can be an exemplar—a system that can be operated around the world and play an important role in sustaining the blue planet for the next generation.

3.49 pm

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on securing the debate and on her excellent work with the all-party fisheries group, of which she is chairman. I also echo her sentiments about the Fishermen's Mission and its continued good work supporting fishermen and their families and local communities, particularly those in my constituency.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray:** I do not want to leave out my hon. Friend—the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn)—who is the joint chairman of the all-party parliamentary group.

**Melanie Onn:** A rare moment of cross-party agreement around fisheries. I thank the hon. Lady for those comments.

Today, I want to focus my remarks primarily on the processing side of the fisheries industry. However, before I get on to that, I want to mention the case of a former fisherman from my constituency. In the debate last year, I raised the case of James Greene, and the issue of fishermen missing out on their pensions unjustly, with subsequent Governments failing to properly compensate them for that. Sadly, James Greene passed away last year, but his widow is still waiting for his full entitlement from the fishermen's compensation scheme. The ship he worked on for 20 years was wrongly omitted from the scheme's list of eligible vessels. That list has been corrected, but the payments owed to James have still not been made in full.

I have been dealing with this matter through the parliamentary ombudsman, but the most recent correspondence I have had sight of says:

“The matters you have raised are not new as they were not in the scope of the investigation. We did not look at the department's decision to pay for work on the Thessalonian at the reduced second scheme rate even though it had mistakenly been excluded under the first scheme...As the Ombudsman has already given this matter her personal attention earlier this year and with no new information provided, we would not look at this matter again.”

That is extremely disappointing. For the sake of his widow, for just £3,000—that is all we are talking about—and for the peace of mind of those at the Great Grimsby Association of Fishermen and Trawlermen, who have been fighting for decades for justice, will the Minister please meet me to see whether there is anything more that can be done to bring this matter to a satisfactory close?

The demise of the fishing industry since its peak in the middle of the 20th century has hit my town particularly hard. What we have seen in Grimsby is the transformation of the sector. While catching has severely diminished, in the way the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) discussed, we are now a hub for the processing, manufacturing, and packaging side of things. We have 75 food sites within a radius of a couple of miles, employing 5,000 people in landing the fish, selling it, smoking it or turning it into fish cakes.

This is necessarily an international industry. The fish caught off our coasts are often not the kind that people in Britain want to eat. Depending on where a catch is landed, the fish that ends up in Grimsby may have crossed the borders of three or four countries on its way to us. Some 270 tonnes of imported fish passes through

our market every week, and these are perishable goods. Anything that makes trading harder could compromise the viability of the main source of employment in my constituency.

**Mr Bradshaw:** Do those potential obstacles to the frictionless trade my hon. Friend talks about include the loss of regulatory alignment, which is the topic of the week?

**Melanie Onn:** Yes. I will come on to regulatory alignment and the variance thereof.

I want to talk briefly about Norway, because it has been mentioned in the debate, and it is often cited as an example of how Britain's fisheries sector could thrive outside the common fisheries policy. However, what is not mentioned is the effect Norway's position has had on its seafood processing sector. By opting out of the CFP, Norway has had to accept losing market access in fisheries. According to the CBI, this trade-off has seen the majority of its seafood processing sector relocate to the EU, with Britain being a substantial winner from that situation. Under that agreement, Norway can sell fresh fish to EU countries with a minimal 2% tariff, but with 13% on processed fish.

Similarly, while we can currently buy fish from Norway and Iceland tariff-free, that may not be the case in just over a year's time. The Minister must fight to ensure that this is not the outcome waiting for Britain after we leave the EU. It would be absolutely catastrophic for jobs and industry in Grimsby.

**Mr Bradshaw:** And it would mean more expensive fish and chips.

**Melanie Onn:** And more expensive fish and chips, as my right hon. Friend says.

I met the Minister with a delegation from Grimsby's seafood processing sector last month to discuss ways to ensure that our ports and industry could continue to grow post Brexit, so I recognise that this issue is on his agenda. However, perhaps he could just update the House on what work he is doing to prepare the sector for the changes coming down the line.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The fishing industry in my area, the south-west of Scotland, is very much lobster and langoustine-based. Eighty-six per cent. of that goes to Europe, so my industry would be decimated if we had barriers.

**Melanie Onn:** I thank the hon. Lady for sharing that point. It just goes to show how important it is, in all areas of the country and in all our coastal communities, that every effort is made to make sure that our local communities do not suffer as the outcome of Brexit becomes ever clearer.

About one in five of the industry's skilled workforce comes from overseas. Training needs to be much more widely available if freedom of movement is no longer going to apply to this country after we leave the European Union. With that in mind, I invite the Minister to visit the fantastic Modal Training facility in my constituency, which provides training for maritime, port and marine workers. I hope that he will take me up on that offer to see the modern training methods that are being used to maintain these essential maritime skills.

3.55 pm

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). I am delighted that we were able to secure this debate through my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray).

Fishing is perhaps the oldest industry in all the south-west and it is deeply ingrained in the culture and heritage of my west Cornwall and Isles of Scilly constituency. Fishing and its supporting industries provide high-quality, skilled jobs that offer year-round employment—a vital factor in a part of the country where seasonal work often dominates.

EU fisheries policies have often seemed to ride roughshod over the interests of the UK fishing fleet. That is perhaps why fishermen were one of the most vocally pro-Brexit groups in the country. I am sure that colleagues will agree, therefore, that leaving the EU presents a real opportunity for the Government to right some historical wrongs and build a sustainable and prosperous future for the UK fishing industry. I think that we can also agree that, as has been said, this will not be without its challenges. However, until we leave the EU, we are still bound by EU regulations, and I am glad to be able to speak in this debate today ahead of the annual EU Fisheries Council meeting in Brussels.

I have spoken to the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation, which is based in my constituency, has a membership of over 250 boats and is one of the largest fishermen's organisations in the UK, and to other local fishermen about their key concerns for the future of fishing. Their message is clear. Fishermen want the UK fishing industry to regain control of access to UK waters out to the 200-mile limit. They want to be able to make use of funding opportunities and to have a regulatory regime determined by the UK Government, not the EU, that permits UK vessels to secure a greater share of total allowable catch.

With regard to the Commission's proposals on Celtic sea cod, haddock and whiting, I have heard serious concerns expressed about their effect on all parts of the fleet in the south-west. The proposals show a lack of understanding of the dynamics of the ultra-mixed fisheries in this area—something that I know the Minister appreciates. I ask that he makes a case for mixed-fisheries-model analysis of these stocks to ensure that the Commission's approach is science-led.

I would also like to highlight, as have others, concerns about the European Commission's proposals on bass fishing for 2018, as clearly set out by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann). The Commission's proposals are based on an inadequate understanding of the bass fisheries, which now comprise, almost exclusively, unavoidable by-catch. Under the proposals, every bass caught in a gillnet, a beam trawl or a trawl will be discarded dead. The key to good fisheries management is to control total fishing mortality, but this fundamental principle seems to have escaped the Commission.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, not least because I represent, I think, the most land-locked constituency of any Member in the Chamber at this time. However, my constituents enjoy eating fish and care about the marine

environment and fish stocks. Does he agree with me, consumers, and myriad campaigning organisations such as the World Wildlife Fund, On The Hook and Greenpeace about the importance of transparency in labelling so that when consumers buy what they believe is sustainably fished fish, they can be confident that it is?

**Derek Thomas:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that has been quite successful, particularly in Newlyn. Newlyn bass is worth a premium in London simply because of clear and correct labelling.

The word 'by-catch' implies that it is unavoidable. The Commission is damaging fishermen's integrity by implying that they are deliberately fishing their by-catch. At the same time, high domestic and continental demand make sea bass a valuable species, so chucking the already dead by-catch back seems senseless. I ask that more time be given to looking at the results of the measures introduced over recent years, which have led to a 70% reduction in landings from the commercial fleet. Steady rebuilding is the right way forward, but avoiding unnecessary discards must be a key part of the policy.

I mentioned earlier that I was grateful to have the Minister and Secretary of State on a visit to Newlyn harbour. The Minister was kind enough to have a Q and A session at the CFPO's annual general meeting, and I make no apology for the thorough quizzing that CFPO members gave him on the future of their livelihood. I note that Councillor Adam Paynter, the leader of Cornwall Council, also accepted my invitation and visited Newlyn last month. I mention those visits, because the team at Newlyn Harbour have developed plans for much-needed investment, under which the harbour would offer a greater range of services and deliver the infrastructure needed to service a vibrant fishing fleet. Their aim is to support innovation, unlock potential within the local fishers and bring in necessary improvements to current infrastructure. That work is aimed at reinforcing Newlyn's leading role in UK fisheries.

Newlyn is ideally located to serve export markets as well as premium UK markets such as London and elsewhere. It will be vital to secure public funding support for international hubs such as Newlyn as we navigate our way out of the EU. Such support will provide Newlyn with extra capacity for boats and enable it to offer better services, such as engineering and boat maintenance. Newlyn has the potential to expand its international enterprise.

The current funding systems do not adequately recognise the needs of the Cornish and wider fishing industries. Small fishing businesses in my constituency that do not have reliable cash flows struggle to capitalise on reimbursement-based grants. Businesses looking to undertake larger projects may look despairingly at their Scottish counterparts, who have long been able to use European regional development funding for ports and harbours, because Scotland negotiated a block exemption on state aid rules. Please, as we leave the EU and look to secure a sustainable fishing industry across the UK's coastal towns, can we provide equal access to funds?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. Because there have been a number of interventions, I will have to reduce the time limit to four minutes after the next speaker, Ronnie Cowan.

4.2 pm

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): I commend you on your good judgment, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I inform you that I will not be taking any interventions.

In Scotland, there is a great divide that has torn apart families and friends. It is not politics, religion or even football, but the age-old question: salt and vinegar, or salt and sauce? Unbelievably, some people prefer sauce with their fish and chips. That is all that most people need to consider. But how often do we stop and wonder: who caught that fish? What were the weather conditions? Who owns the boat? How much debt are they in? Will the bank lend to them? What sort of living do they make, and are they safe at sea? For generations, fishing families have braved the seas and oceans to put food on our plates, but they can continue to do so only if they and their fishing waters are protected.

Post Brexit, who decides? In the Faroe Islands, the fishing industry accounts for about 90% of total exports. The Danish Government have respected that and allowed the Faroes to negotiate their own treaties. As a result, the Faroes are thriving. That sort of thing is possible when one Parliament respects and trusts another. As we move closer to Brexit, will the UK respect and trust Scotland? Like those of the Faroe Islands, Scotland's seas are vital. They are the fourth largest in the EU, and they are potentially the richest. On average, around four tonnes of fish are taken from each square nautical mile of Scottish waters, compared with around one tonne on average for EU waters. Neighbouring countries are highly dependent on Scotland's waters for their landings. Germany and the rest of the UK land around 30% of their fishing catches, by weight, from Scottish waters.

If Scotland was a normal independent nation, we would negotiate directly with other countries to get the best possible deal for this key sector of our economy. Scottish fisherman will be looking to the future with trepidation over their funding and investment situation. We would be wise to look to Norway, where all parties involved in fisheries, regardless of size, have a seat around the table, where all are equally respected, and where fishermen, policy makers, politicians and managers all listen to each other in an atmosphere of equality. No sector dominates to the detriment of another.

I want to be clear that the SNP agrees that the common fisheries policy has been burdensome on the Scottish fishing industry. Ever since 1983, when it was debated in the House, we have consistently opposed the policy, as was mentioned earlier. We understand that, although every voting area in Scotland voted to remain in the EU, many Scottish fishermen undoubtedly voted to leave and to "take back control". What does taking back control look like for the Scottish fishing industry?

HSBC estimates that the overall loss of access to the single market will initially cost the industry £42 million a year. Over a quarter of crew in the Scottish fishing fleet are non-UK nationals, yet European workers still do not have clarity regarding their working rights. As my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) mentioned, a recruitment crisis is looming. We also require access to EU markets: 86% of all the west coast of Scotland's shellfish currently goes to the EU. This has to continue somehow. New markets in the far east can be pursued long term, but core markets must be preserved.

Finally, it is not just livelihoods at risk, but lives. While we are restructuring our fishing industries, we must give our fishermen the security of a coastguard capable of reacting to emergencies. The loss of fishing vessels such as the *Louisa* and the mistakes being made cannot be ignored. We should see this period as an opportunity to do things better. Will the Minister seek to develop a fair allocation of quota, provide improved training for domestic fishermen, create fair and flexible fisheries access and management for inshore fleets, and regenerate our coastal fleets and the associated facilities around the coast? We have this opportunity now and must act now.

4.7 pm

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I wish to start by paying tribute to Sean Hunter, a Brixham fisherman who sadly lost his life in the past week. He was deeply loved by his family and the whole community, and I know that the House will want to join me in sending our deepest condolences to his family.

I also pay tribute to the Fishermen's Mission, which does much to support fishermen, their families and our wider communities, and join other Members in paying tribute to the coastguard, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the National Coastwatch Institution and all the emergency services for their professionalism and courage. Most of all, however, I want to thank the fishers themselves, who do so much, in such challenging conditions, to put food on our plates and bring so much to our national and local economies. The value of the catch to the UK economy in 2016 was £936 million.

I am also delighted to say that Brixham has again been voted the No. 1 fishing port in the UK, landing the most valuable catch in England. In excess of £30 million has been sold through Brixham fish market in the last year, and that is providing jobs not just at sea but in the processing sector on land. We recognise the value of all those jobs.

I also pay tribute to the responsible actions of our fishers, who have done much in responding to scientific advice to improve the sustainability of many of our species. However, just as we expect our fishers to respond to that scientific advice and reduce the total allowable catch, in many cases, so I would ask the Minister to respond and recognise that we expect fairness when the scientific data shows we are fishing sustainably. In his negotiations, in which I wish him well, will he therefore look at the sole quotas in VIId and VIIe? There is a very strong case for their being increased further.

We need to look again at the value of the scientific evidence on which the quotas are based. In responding to the debate, will the Minister listen to the concerns of fishermen who are asking for greater access to fisheries science partnerships in co-operation with CEFAS? I am concerned to hear that too often these requests are turned down. For some years, the UK has agreed to adhere to the data collection framework, so it is of great concern to hear that the sprat stock, for example, is still described as "Data Deficient". In his response, will the Minister say what is going to happen about that in future?

Several colleagues have raised the issues of bass fisheries. As time is short, I will not dwell on them, except perhaps to thank the Devon and Severn inshore fisheries and conservation authority for meeting me to discuss

the wrasse fisheries, and to hold that up as an example of where responsible but proportionate precautionary principles are being applied.

In my closing moments, I say to the Minister that as we now move to thinking about where we are with Brexit and beyond, fishing communities want to see fairness. We recognise that we need to avoid falling into an acrimonious Brexit, but to maintain good relations in order to trade with our neighbours in the future. I just hope that he will make sure that our fishing communities are not let down, as they were in 1973.

4.10 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), and I congratulate my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), on securing the debate.

At the beginning of every fisheries debate, it is right that we praise the amazing charities that provide rescue and support for the fishing industry, such as the RNLI, the coastguard and the Fishermen's Mission. Today I want to pay special tribute to Tony Jones—a respected fisherman of many years who is missed not only by the fishing community in Plymouth, but around the country—who died when the Solstice trawler was lost at sea off Plymouth recently. Our thoughts remain with his family, and with Nick and Chris, who survived that quick capsizing.

I want to pass on special thanks to the RNLI crews from Plymouth, Looe and Salcombe who reacted so quickly in searching for the vessel. It might be useful for hon. Members who do not follow their local RNLI on Twitter to search out the #outonashout Twitter feed, which tweets every time an RNLI lifeboat launches, because they will be amazed at just how many times those brave volunteers go to sea to save lives.

We must do more to protect and secure safety at sea, which means matching our words with actions. I am very grateful to the Minister for Transport Legislation and Maritime for the action he secured following the possible delay to lifeboat tasking after the sinking of the Solstice. He said that there would be “no stone left unturned”, and so far he has been true to his word. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), an SNP Member, for his support after the sinking of the Solstice, including through sharing his experience of the sinking of the *Louisa* from his constituency.

The proper investigations are under way and it is not right to prejudge them, but I know that areas in which there can be improved tasking of lifeboats have already been identified by the coastguard. I hope that they will be put in place so that lives can be saved more quickly at sea. This is not a partisan request, because I believe there is cross-party support for ensuring that safety at sea is put ahead of any political considerations. In the meantime, I have asked the coastguard to do all it can to rebuild the Plymouth fishing industry's confidence in knowing that the coastguard will take action in the event of a disaster or a trawler going missing.

Fishing is a really important industry for Plymouth. We have a vibrant fishing community that we want to strengthen in the years ahead. It is vital not only that we campaign for the right Brexit deal to protect our fisheries, as has been mentioned, but that fishing infrastructure around the country is protected. In particular, that

means not building luxury flats on the fishing quay in Plymouth, therefore ensuring that there is protection for the fishing industry for many years to come. Plymouth also needs a new state-of-the-art fish market, and I hope the Government will look at how investments can be secured to ensure that, in whatever port around the country, Britain's fishing industry can access the very best of technologies and facilities to ensure its success for many years.

I am proud that Plymouth is leading the way towards blue belting, following the example set in “Blue Planet II”, in securing the first national marine park, which I hope will be designated in Plymouth sound. The scheme has cross-party support, as well as the support of world-class institutions based in Plymouth including, among many others, the Plymouth Marine Laboratory and the National Marine Aquarium.

Finally, I want to heap praise on the fantastic work of Plymouth City Council in its Plymouth lifejackets campaign. Some 120 personal flotation devices, equipped with locator beacons, have now been given out to those in the fishing industry in Plymouth. This has been supported by a £77,000 grant from the European maritime and fisheries fund and the MMO. As one RNLI coxswain put it, this is designed to take the search out of search and rescue.

At this time, the House has an awful lot to be proud of in the fishing industry. Knowing how dangerous fishing is, we should heap praise on those involved for all the work that they do.

4.14 pm

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Although my constituency contains 31 miles of magnificent North sea coastline, it does not have much of a fishing industry—certainly not as much as the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid). However, I thought it was important that I speak in today's debate on the eve of the Fisheries Council that will set quotas for all European fishing fleets. In a previous life, I had the great privilege to work for just over a year in the European Parliament for Ian Duncan, now Lord Duncan, who was the Conservative spokesperson on fisheries. One could not find a bigger advocate for the industry.

I quickly learned that someone enters the world of fishing unprepared at their peril. More importantly, I learned about the skill, dedication and ingenuity of British and Scottish fishermen and the wider industry, and of the producer organisations of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association with Mike Park, the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association with Ian Gatt, the Shetland Fishermen's Association with Simon Collins, and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation with Bertie Armstrong. Faced with overwhelming regulation, bans, recovery plans, and a bureaucratic sea of red tape that would test any industry, they have adapted and overcome. It is through their work and actions, not the words of politicians and civil servants at the Berlaymont or Rue Wiertz, that we are seeing record landings at Peterhead. Amazingly, this year North sea cod has been recertified as sustainable.

We are having the debate because of next week's Council in Brussels. In reality, as the Minister is well aware, the big decisions have already been taken at the EU-Faroes and EU-Norway negotiations. On the whole, it has been quite a positive year for the Scottish fishing fleet.

[Andrew Bowie]

I pay tribute to those unsung allies and supporters of the industry in Brussels who have fought the good fight over the years in trialogues, at the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries and at various Councils. Right now this is an uncertain time for them as we prepare to leave the European Union. As we speak, they are working hard to defend British interests as regulations that will affect the British fishing industry, such as the extension of the North sea plan, continue to be made.

We wish every success at Council next week to my hon. Friend the Minister, those at UKRep, all British staff at the Commission, and Caroline Healy at the secretariat of the European Conservatives and Reformists group. She works with the industry day in, day out, to defend it and give it a voice at the heart of the EU. For all the work that has been done for the fishing industry during our membership of the CFP, and for all the work still being done, I say thank you. Through the work of those individuals and their predecessors, the industry is in a strong position as we set sail into the sea of opportunity that is a post-CFP world.

4.17 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As a member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, and in recognition of its ongoing inquiry on fisheries, I thought it pertinent that I say a few words.

The opposition to the CFP is obvious, but we cannot forget that it was the Ted Heath Tory Government who deemed that Scottish fishermen were expendable in the wider UK interest. Back then there were 23 Scottish Tory MPs, yet we are now meant to believe that the new baker's dozen will somehow hold this Government to account.

There is no doubt that everybody appreciates how critical fishing is to coastal communities, but in the bigger picture it accounts for only 0.1% of GDP. With successive Governments in thrall to the London's financial sector and house prices, what will be the overall Government priorities? How can we believe guarantees from the fisheries Minister that there will be separation and ring-fencing of fishing access.

UNCLOS will be the post-Brexit fallback, but it also allows historical rights to be taken into account. There therefore must be discussions on the subject, but given that the UK Government have already allowed 18 months to pass without even closing preliminary discussions with the EU, they will have to up their game over the next 15 months.

The prize is control over the waters and management of the stock in a sustainable way. In the same vein, Scotland must have control over its waters. Ours are the fourth largest in Europe—they account for 60% of the UK's waters, and 38% of current EU allowable catch. Scotland is therefore critical to the overall process. It is fine to argue for an overall UK framework, but that must be agreed with the devolved nations, not imposed on them.

These concerns are echoed by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, which wants all EU powers devolved straight to Edinburgh, because it trusts the Scottish Government. Scotland also needs to be allocated budgets that are currently accessed via the EU, such as that from the

European maritime and fisheries fund. Even that funding is proof of the low priority that the UK Government give this and their weakness in negotiations with the EU.

The forthcoming fisheries paper needs to flesh out a lot of things, so I hope that we will hear from the Minister about it. What will the quota management system be based on? We cannot continue a system that sees some of Scotland's quotas traded, such as for blue whiting, or the top-slicing of The Hague preference quota, which has seen Scotland lose out on over 1,000 tonnes of whiting over the past five years. The UK Government really need to publish and implement the new fisheries concordat that was agreed by Ministers in August 2016. The Environment Secretary needs to ensure that licencing starts to eliminate the "slipper skippers". If people cannot afford or access quota licences, the perceived opportunities for job creation will be lost. Quota hopping also needs to be addressed.

Problems might arise with trade tariffs if access to the single market is not maintained. As we have heard, the cost to the sector of leaving the single market is estimated at £42 million. A customs agreement is clearly vital for such special products with a limited lifespan.

How will the EEZ be policed? What will transition periods look like? Bertie Armstrong of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation advises that a nine-month transitional or bridging period is required. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State talks about leaving the CFP early, or on day one, but that is at odds with what fishermen say is required. There will be opportunities, but the UK Government must up their game and need to start giving out better information.

4.21 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): I would like to take the opportunity of this debate on the fishing industry, using the broad definition of that industry as the commercial activity of harvesting, processing and marketing aquatic produce for human consumption, to make a positive request of the Minister. Since 1995, the amount of caught fish in the world has been flatlining, but the amount of fish used for food has continued to grow and outpace global population growth. The gap is being filled by the miracle of aquaculture.

Forty years ago, 93% of seafood came from capture fisheries—trawlers and traditional fishing—and only 7% came from global aquaculture. Today, however, more than 50% of the world's seafood comes from aquaculture and that figure is only going to rise. The number of aquaculture-produced fish is staggering. Today, more than 50% of globally consumed fish is being produced on fish farms. As of 2014, that is equivalent to 73.8 million tonnes of fish, which equivalent in weight to 377 jumbo jets. That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a lot of fish. It makes a huge contribution to feeding the world's population. Aquaculture provides a highly efficient source of animal protein for human consumption and is critical to future food security for the rapidly increasing global population.

It will come as no surprise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to hear a Scottish Member talk about Scottish food as being the best in the world. Our salmon, born and bred in Scottish waters, is second to none. The growth of aquaculture has allowed this industry to thrive. In 2016, we found 13.7 million salmon in Scotland. According to a DEFRA-commissioned report that was

published in July 2017, 85% of the volume of farmed fish and shellfish grown in the UK is produced in Scotland, and 92% of the value of UK aquaculture is produced in Scotland. According to a report commissioned and published this year by the Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the aquaculture supply chain in Scotland employs over 12,000 people. According to the Food and Drink Federation, so far in 2017, salmon alone is the UK's No. 1 food export.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman understand that one reason why the SNP is calling for Scotland to remain in the single market and the customs union is precisely so that we do not have prime salmon backed-up at customs checkpoints?

**Stephen Kerr:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We certainly do not want that, because the value of salmon to the UK economy is close to the value of the entire landings of all species of fish by UK vessels in capture fisheries. We want that to increase.

If a barrel of oil is worth \$50, the equivalent value of a barrel of salmon is more than \$1,200. That is why the Norwegian Government's national policy is that aquaculture is the sustainable industry for when oil runs out. The industry is already estimated to be worth £1.8 billion to the Scottish economy, but we must go for growth. The Scottish national marine plan has a target of increasing production from the current level of 170,000 tonnes to 210,000 tonnes in the coming year. That can be achieved if we focus on productivity, and we can best do that by focusing on the cutting-edge science involved in food production.

That brings me back to my constituency of Stirling. The Institute of Aquaculture and Global Aquatic Food Security is based at Stirling University, as is the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre. They work together to develop vaccines, cultivation methods and productivity techniques that have had an impact in countries all over the world, including Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole. With the help of the centre, we can increase productivity in our domestic industry and do our bit to develop a global industry that will ultimately feed the world, which must be a very worthy objective.

Now I come to my request to the Minister. A very important part of the Stirling city region deal is investment in the infrastructure of the Institute of Aquaculture and Global Aquatic Food Security and the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre. May I press the Minister to help me to secure a £20 million investment as part of the deal? That will serve as an ignition point for millions of pounds of private investment in the industry, with a potential prize of an additional £254 million in increased gross value, more than 3,000 new jobs, and more than £690 million in additional sales. The ambition is very clear. The institute says:

"We are determined that Scotland and the UK remain at the forefront of global aquaculture and that we do not lose the potential for high value employment and sustainable economic growth through innovation and enterprise in aquatic food production.

We have created a bold vision for the development of our aquaculture infrastructure, ensuring that we can match current and future industry needs. This development is underpinned by a scientific strategy that will ensure that Stirling remains synonymous with excellence in aquaculture."

I ask the Minister to help me to secure the money, so that we can make that a reality.

4.25 pm

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): I hoped to make a wide-ranging speech about the practical and policy dangers that face the Welsh fishing industry, but instead I shall concentrate on just three issues. First, I shall set out the unique nature and structure of the Welsh commercial fishing industry. Secondly, I shall highlight some of the concerns that have been raised with me about the UK Government's trade policies. Finally, I shall implore the Government to give coastal communities, and fishermen and women throughout Wales, the tangible assurances that they deserve.

The Welsh fishing fleet, which consists of approximately 400 vessels, operates in some of the most challenging environments. Not only does it face hostile sea conditions, but it must operate within a low quota of 100 tonnes a year for fish covered by the total allowable catch regulations. The adaptable and hardy Welsh fishing industry has adapted to those conditions, focusing much of its attention on non-TAC species including sea bass, about which we have heard a great deal this afternoon, and significant amounts of shellfish, but it walks a fine line. One fisherman told me that his family lived hand to mouth, not knowing from one month to the next whether they would be able to meet their financial obligations.

The Welsh Fishermen's Association has drawn my attention to some striking analysis which underlines the precariousness of the Welsh fishing fleet's position. If there were a mere four weeks of delays in our current trading relationships, the Welsh fishing fleet would be in danger of collapse, and a delay of six weeks would cause catastrophic business failures throughout the sector. That takes me to my next point: the trade issues that are at the forefront of Welsh fishermen's minds.

Our small-scale fleet trades widely in a dynamic market of live and therefore perishable products. Tariff barriers will of course have a huge impact on their viability, but, as we heard from the right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell), non-tariff barriers could be just as devastating, if not more so. Trade in live or fresh food produce is a tricky business at the best of times, but customs checks and additional delays in the process of trade will cause the value of the produce to deteriorate, which will render trade unviable and, in certain circumstances, impossible. By gambling away our existing trade relationship with the EU, we risk the creation of customs checks and a raft of non-tariff barriers. Empty rhetoric about "frictionless trade" is meaningless to the coastal communities who are peering over the edge of the hard-Brexit cliff that the Government have created.

I will not apologise for repeating, once again, a simple solution to the problem: retaining membership of the customs union and the single market. If the Welsh fishing industry is decimated, as it might well be if the Government carry on as they are, investment will be drained from coastal communities such as those in Ceredigion. They are already hard hit, and this money is unlikely to return to them.

I urge the UK Government to reconsider their position on the customs union and single market, as that would safeguard the viability of the Welsh fishing industry. I also echo the remarks of the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan): the UK Government's pursuit of future markets and trade deals must not come at the expense of today's fishing fleet. A fisherman I spoke to asked a

[Ben Lake]

disarmingly simple but extremely pertinent question: “There may be opportunities somewhere in the intangible distance, but if there is no fleet left by the time we get there, what is the point?”

4.30 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Yesterday my colleague the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) and the former Minister for Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland met the Minister to discuss the forthcoming meetings. It is always good to see the Minister in his place; he is a friend of the fishermen and there is no better person to speak on our behalf in this Chamber.

The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations has a five-step plan. I do not have time to go into that in detail, but the federation mentions in its brief:

“A house divided amongst itself will fall.”

This House today is united: all parties and Members are working together behind our Minister.

While the devolution of fishing is necessary for the fine-tuning of everyday issues, there is also a wish among the industry for pragmatism and, where appropriate, maintaining a United Kingdom-wide policy framework, particularly on licensing and the trade of quota. It does not serve the Northern Ireland, Scottish, English or Welsh fishing industries well when barriers in the form of temporary moratoriums are erected around the transfer of quota units within the United Kingdom or restrictions are placed on the port of registration of licensing administration.

A confusing picture is emanating from Ireland, typified by evidence provided by Irish fishing industry representatives to the Irish Parliament’s Brexit Committee during a hearing on 24 January 2017. During that session, contributors stated that up to 70% of mackerel and nephrops annually caught by Ireland’s fishing fleet was taken from UK waters. It seems it was all right for them and other EU fishermen to draw a blank fisheries cheque from UK waters, but not for others to draw such cheques from Irish waters. I put that marker down, to go on the record in *Hansard*.

Northern Ireland fishermen are looking east to the rest of the UK for their future, not to the south, and certainly not to the EU. They expect that the wrongs imposed on them by the common fisheries policy, typified by the application of The Hague preference quota regime, will be righted. For our fishermen, removal of the preference is a red line.

It may be convenient for the Irish Government to blame the UK’s withdrawal from this convention as a reason for not progressing their Sea-Fisheries (Amendment) Bill, but the fact is that their minds were made up beforehand to erect a hard border against fishermen from Northern Ireland, as a tactic to secure future access arrangements for the Irish fleet to British waters, on which, as mentioned, they heavily depend. It is with regret that we conclude the time has come to withdraw from the voisinage agreement, and we urge the Minister to act on this matter soon.

The Minister is well-versed on the issues surrounding the need for non-UK crew. The Department for Communities in Northern Ireland ran a recruitment drive for 150 crew for local fishing vessels. There were

30 expressions of interest in the positions from across the EU. Some 19 candidates were invited to interview, and only six attended for interview, with five of them being offered positions after sea survival training. So 145 places are left in Northern Ireland. I commend the hon. Members for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara) and for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), who have spoken on this matter. The process we have is not working, and we need to do more on this.

I ask the Minister also to remember the long-term cod management plan and ensure that the sea cod TAC is kept for us and increased across Northern Ireland. I also stress the importance of nephrops to my constituency of Strangford and the villages and fishermen of Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel.

These are key stocks for Northern Ireland, as well as the Minister’s constituents in the south-west of England, yet it seems that, against a background of much better news from the Irish sea, the European Commission continues to find something to create discontent and upset. This kind of arm-twisting is unacceptable. There will be a better future for our fishermen, and the December 2017 Agriculture and Fisheries Council should offer a first step in that direction.

4.34 pm

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): This is the first time that I have taken part in the annual fishing debate, and I am delighted to have this opportunity to sum up for the Scottish National party. Although I was born in Aberdeen and have lived most of my life there, before I was five I lived in Gamrie, which is also known as Gardenstown, near Banff in the north-east of Scotland. That little community has historically been dominated by fishing and continues to be so to this day. My great-great-grandfather, John Murray, was killed while fishing, at the age of 34, during the first world war. My grandfather—my “granda”—John West, was the skipper of the Banff-registered *May Lily*, a 70-foot trawler that went out from Gamrie. He skippered that vessel from 1968 to 1975, having been on it for a number of years before that. The fishing history is strong in my family, particularly on my dad’s side.

It was a very different landscape back then; people had very different attitudes. The boats were much smaller, and people stayed on one fishing boat for much longer than they perhaps do nowadays. Things have moved quite significantly, particularly since the 1970s, but even in recent years there has been a significant change. One of the big changes in recent years has been the increase in sustainability. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) mentioned cod stocks, and the reason for the increase in sustainability is the better management of the fishing stocks. We are able to look at this scientifically and sustainably to ensure that the stocks continue to grow so that we can ensure the future of the fishing industry for the long term in the north-east of Scotland and across the rest of the United Kingdom. In the UK, 65% of the tonnage of fish landed by UK vessels is landed by Scottish vessels. Over 50% of all fishing jobs in the UK are in Scotland, as are 56% of the jobs involved in going out fishing, rather than in the processing side.

The SNP has regularly raised a number of concerns about the way in which the UK deals with fishing. The deficiencies of the common fisheries policy have been

raised by my colleagues and by other Members across the House today, but we have particular concerns about the way in which the UK decides to divvy up the quotas. The North sea whiting top-slice continues to be a major concern to us. Allowing English coastal communities to have more for their 10-metre-and-under inshore vessels is disadvantaging Scottish fishermen. The Scottish Government have been absolutely consistent in their criticism of that policy, and we will continue to be so.

Another thing that my colleagues have mentioned is the UK's swap package, particularly in relation to blue whiting. That continues to be a concern for us as well. We cannot be swapping with Norway and not getting back what our fishermen fish. We have been consistent in our criticism of the way in which the UK Government have prioritised the fishing industry. It is incredibly important in the north-east of Scotland. It is not that we want to see less priority being given to fishermen in English coastal communities; we want to see more priority given to those who are trawling for white fish in particular in the north-east of Scotland and across the whole of Scotland. That is another major concern.

A number of Members have talked about Brexit. I want to mention the new port and the refurbishments that have been done at the port in Peterhead. More than £5 million of the money that went into the new port came from the European Union, and a further £6 million came from the Scottish Government to improve the port at Peterhead. I understand that the new fish market is under way, and is looking very positive. However, that could not have been done in the same format without the European money that we have received, and we would like some clarity from the Minister as to what will replace it. What will he do to ensure that our fishing industry is fit for the future, particularly in relation to the critical infrastructure that is needed? Peterhead is an amazing port that lands a significant proportion of the fish that is landed across the United Kingdom, and we need to ensure that we can continue to have the curve on them.

In more Brexit-related issues, the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), who introduced the debate, talked specifically about trading with France, but few people seem to realise how much we export to France, which is the destination for 27.5% of our fish exports. It is therefore incredibly important for our fish processors and fishermen and for everybody involved in the fishing industry that we have a trade deal with France, and therefore the whole European Union, that allows us to export that amount with few hold-ups at customs and that does not have the 7% to 11% tariffs that we would see under WTO rules, which would be a major problem. As has been mentioned already, leaving the single market will cost the industry about £42 million, which is an incredible amount of money.

My last point is about the Government's prioritisation of looking at the industries that will be hit by Brexit. I am unsure of their level of prioritisation, but the little prioritisation that they are doing seems to be concentrated on industries that offer a particularly high tax take for the Treasury, such as the finance and car industries. I want them to look a little more at the communities that will be decimated by the loss of a certain industry, such as fishing, and to prioritise on that basis as well.

4.40 pm

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): We have had an excellent debate this afternoon ahead of the annual December Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting. I start by thanking all those who have taken part in this thoughtful and considered discussion, which saw representations that reflect the diverse fishing activity that is happening all over our country. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), who secured this debate, for her characteristically insightful speech—I know that this policy area is close to her heart. I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), because there have been tragedies at sea since last year's debate. I send our thoughts to those who have lost loved ones and to those who have been injured at sea, particularly the friends and family of the crew of the fishing vessel *Solstice*. I ask the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) to send our condolences back to her constituency following the tragedy that she shared with us. I join all those who paid tribute to the RNLI for its incredible work and to organisations, including the Fishermen's Mission, who do so much to support the wellbeing of not only those who spend their lives fishing at sea, but their families.

In anticipation of this debate, I looked back in *Hansard* at last year's discussion. This is the second fisheries debate since the referendum, yet many of the questions that hon. Members from across the House were asking in December 2016 are still being asked a year on. In the past 12 months, we do not seem to have moved any closer to clarity on what a post-Brexit fisheries policy will mean for our fishing communities up and down the country. While there is diversity and robust adaptability within the UK fishing fleet, which have allowed it to weather both rough seas and changing political landscapes, people's fears about and aspirations for a post-Brexit policy depend on where they are in the country and what is being fished. Last week, the Labour party launched a consultation on fishing ahead of the upcoming fisheries Bill, which was announced in the Queen's Speech, to ensure that those with an interest can have a say in that process, and I am looking forward to going through those submissions.

The rhetoric of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has driven expectations for a significant uplift in economic activity in the fishing sector, which we are all keen to see, so the challenge now is how and when he proposes to deliver it. I hope the Minister can update the House today on what progress has been made to prepare the UK to become an independent coastal state and on where fishing currently features in the Brexit negotiations. When this country leaves the EU in March 2019, what will be the framework for agreeing the total allowable catches as a means of managing fish stocks that we share with neighbouring countries? Despite his tough taking-back-control narrative, the Secretary of State apparently told the Danish market back in August that

“boats from EU countries will still be able to operate in UK waters after Brexit, as the UK does not have enough capacity to catch and process all its fish alone.”

Like most of the fishing industry, I am keen to see the evidence upon which he based that policy decision. Will the Minister explain to us how that system would

[Holly Lynch]

be managed, who would have access to our waters, and what the mechanism will be for agreeing allocations of quota to vessels from the rest of the EU?

In addition to the question of our waters and access, the other area of uncertainty for the fishing industry is trade, which has come up many times today. Although the level of dependence on the European market varies by sector, up to 85% of our crab, lobster and prawns are sold into Europe. We will need the freest possible trade with our neighbours if we are to satisfy the demand from European consumers for our top-quality shellfish. The point has already been made—including in the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), who represents a constituency with a thriving fish processing sector—that, when dealing with fresh produce, financial barriers are not the only challenge, and ensuring there are no delays that could compromise the smooth and timely movement of fish across borders will be essential if we are to maintain our existing routes to markets outside the UK.

That was made clear to me when I met fishermen in North Shields with my right hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell), who represented his local fishing community admirably this afternoon. I thank him for his kind remarks, which were certainly kinder than the remarks I heard when I worked under him in the Opposition Whips Office.

It is reassuring that there is firm common ground between the fishing industry, conservationists, recreational fishers and consumers alike that a sustainable approach to a new fishing policy is the only game in town. For a sustainable approach to work, we need two things: we have to get the science right if we are to have confidence in managing fish stocks responsibly; and we have to have a means of robustly enforcing that approach. With that in mind, I am concerned to see that the number of fishing vessels inspected by the fishery protection squadron has fallen from 1,400 in 2011-12 to just 278 in 2016-17. Does the Minister agree that, for all the technological developments, which I certainly welcome, the ability to board a vessel and inspect the operations on board will be essential if we are to manage fish stocks sustainably? I hope the Minister will indicate how he envisages the future of fisheries enforcement to work post-Brexit and confirm that the fishery protection squadron will be resourced to carry out its objectives effectively.

Another issue that came up time and again as I visited coastal towns is the failure to attract the next generation into fishing. If we are to capitalise on an increased quota that drives economic activity and job creation in our coastal towns, we will need a new approach to training. The Whitby fishing school explained to me some of the difficulties of securing funding for courses. The school finds it incredibly difficult to deliver courses that both truly equip young people to work at sea and tick the relevant boxes to secure funding for that training, so it has asked the Government to reflect on whether the framework in place for delivering apprenticeships and training programmes is fit for purpose in attracting and retaining the fishermen and women of tomorrow.

On funding and infrastructure, the European maritime and fisheries fund has facilitated crucial strategic investment that has helped to support jobs and promote sustainability.

For the benefit of those planning bids for investment in their area over the coming years, such as the fish quay in North Shields, will the Minister provide further information on the plans in place for replacing the fund? I am keen to hear his response to the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on infrastructure to support aquaculture.

On conservation, there is renewed public awareness of the need for action to preserve our marine environment as a result of David Attenborough's "Blue Planet II", as my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) said in his powerful speech—my right hon. Friend has always used his experience to be a real champion of responsible fish management. More than 10 million people are tuning in to watch every week and, as anyone who has seen the show will appreciate, there could be no better showcase for our marine life, demonstrating just how visually stunning yet incredibly vulnerable it is.

We are proud of our record in government, and of introducing the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. We included bold commitments in our manifesto ahead of this year's general election. The Minister will be aware of the blue belt pledges, which include the goals of establishing a marine protected area around the South Sandwich Islands in 2018 and of delivering on the commitment to establish a fully protected area in at least 50% of Ascension Island's waters in 2019. I hope he will reaffirm his commitment to conservation and express Government support for such an initiative.

Marine protection and fisheries management are two sides of the same coin. If we get it right and set the standard both domestically and in our waters around the world, we can secure a flourishing marine environment and a strong and profitable fisheries sector. It is fair to say that the need for certainty from the Government is a theme that has run throughout the contributions today. On many of the biggest questions faced by the fisheries sector, although hopes are certainly high, we are still in the dark on much of the detail. There are plenty of opportunities for our fishermen and women and those in related sectors as we leave the EU, but what we desperately need to see from this Government is the road map outlining just how we deliver on them.

That having been said, may I take this opportunity to wish the Minister all the very best for the upcoming Council meeting? We all have a vested interest in it going well and we all have our fingers crossed that he is a better negotiator with our European neighbours than perhaps some of his colleagues.

4.49 pm

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** I thank the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for her good wishes for us at the upcoming negotiations. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) and the all-party group on fisheries on securing this annual debate. It takes place at a crucial time, because every year in November and December we have a series of important fisheries negotiations, and this will be the fifth year I attend the December Fisheries Council. It is also crucial because of the context: the fact that we are leaving the EU and working on future domestic fisheries policy, as a number of hon. Members have pointed out.

Fishing, aquaculture and fish processing is an incredibly important industry for this country, contributing £1.5 billion to our economy and employing 33,000 people. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) pointed out the great potential for aquaculture, and we have seen some fantastic results in the Scottish salmon industry—this is one of our great exports. I am more than happy to meet him to discuss his thoughts and proposals to take that forward in his constituency. The catching sector is also vital to many of our coastal communities, as the sheer number of contributions we have heard today attests. We have heard contributions from Members from Northern Ireland, Cornwall, Wales, Scotland and the east coast, and from those on the channel. We have heard from Members from right around our country—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, have I missed one?

**Luke Pollard:** Devon.

**George Eustice:** And Devon—we always miss out Devon and Cornwall, as the hon. Gentleman knows. This industry has vital significance to our coastal communities, but we also know that this is a dangerous occupation. My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall suffered a very personal tragedy in this regard, and I pay tribute to the work she has done since on issues such as marine safety. In 2017, five fishermen lost their lives, and our thoughts are with all those families affected.

In today's debate, we have heard some personal accounts of people who have experienced tragedy in their own constituencies, including from the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell), who talked about a memorial in his constituency, and the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), who gave a personal account of one of her ancestors who suffered a tragedy in this area.

I turn now to this year's negotiations. The first thing to note, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) pointed out, is that a series of negotiations take place at this time of year. For Scotland, and for constituencies such as Orkney and Shetland, and Banff and Buchan, the negotiations that really matter, perhaps more than any other, are the annual EU-Norway bilateral negotiations. This year, we have seen some positive outcomes from those negotiations, which concluded in Bergen last week, with the discard ban uplifts being included, as these stocks are now at the maximum sustainable yield—MSY. For example, we are seeing increases in cod of 10% and in haddock of 24%, as well as an increase in whiting and, for the first time in some time, a significant increase in herring.

Also taking place at the moment are the annual coastal states negotiations, which include other neighbouring countries not in the EU, such as the Faroes, Iceland and even Russia. There was a third round of those negotiations yesterday. There was a sticking point with Russia over Atlanto-Scandian herring, so those negotiations are ongoing, but the emerging point of significance for the Scottish industry in particular is that we have limited the cut on mackerel to about 20%, in order to do a staged reduction to ensure that we keep the stock at MSY. That follows several years when there has been a very positive outlook for these stocks.

I turn to the December Council next week. For 2017, 29 of the 45 quota stocks in which the UK has an interest are now at MSY, and it remains an absolute priority for the Government to try to progress more stocks to MSY next year, in 2018. This year, for the first time in many years, we have seen a more positive outlook with regard to the Irish sea. In particular, the scientific advice on nephrops is more positive, and we believe it may therefore be possible to get area VIIa nephrops to MSY sooner than anticipated. The science also supports significant uplifts for cod and haddock, albeit from a low base.

There is positive news on the east coast and the eastern channel for skates and rays, which is particularly important for some of our south-coast fishermen, with the science supporting an increase there and with no new evidence that we are likely to see a roll-over in the Celtic sea.

**Mr Bradshaw:** Will the Minister give way?

**George Eustice:** I am going to carry on because I want to cover as many issues as possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) pointed out that the Celtic sea remains challenging. We are doing some mixed fishery analysis there, but the gadoid fishery, with whiting, cod and haddock, continues to create challenges and we are working with our scientists to address them.

There have been other changes this year. For the first time, the Commission is keen to progress a prohibition on the landing of eel. The UK has signalled that we support that, but we do not believe that marine catch should be the only area we look at; we have to look at the impacts on eels inshore as well.

As several hon. Members pointed out, we anticipate that bass will again be a controversial issue this year. Three years ago, as Fisheries Minister, I pushed for emergency measures for bass because the stock is in a precarious state. We secured that and I have tried since to ensure that the Commission gets the balance right between the actions it takes on recreational anglers and those they take on commercial fishing. We argued last year that there should be a lower catch limit for the hook-and-line commercial fishermen to create the headroom to give more leeway for recreational anglers. I will make a similar argument this year, but the scientific evidence has not been benchmarked to take account of the measures that have already been introduced, so the right thing to do might be to review the bass situation properly in March and we will point that out.

A number of hon. Members have talked about future policy. Everyone will be aware that it is our intention and plan to introduce a fisheries Bill in this Session. Early next year, we will publish more detailed proposals for that Bill, which we anticipate will be introduced during the course of the year, probably before the summer. The Bill will set out very clearly our approach, which is that when we leave the European Union we will become an independent coastal state under international law. We will take control of our exclusive economic zone, which is out to 200 miles or the median line. From that point, we will work with our neighbours to agree issues such as access and quota shares. The hon. Member for Halifax asked what the basis of those quota allocations

[George Eustice]

would be. We are looking at the issue of zonal attachment, which most people recognise is the fairest way to do such things.

My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall asked whether we have historical catch data. We do. As she pointed out, the UK catches about 100,000 tonnes of fish a year in EU waters, and EU vessels catch some 750,000 tonnes in our waters, so there is an imbalance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has visited the Faroe Islands to discuss its approach. Our view is that the six to 12-mile zone should be predominantly reserved for UK vessels, to keep that fishing pressure down. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) pointed out, however, there are issues such as Ireland and voisinage agreement, to which we are committed and which we support.

The right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) argued that we would lose influence by leaving the EU. I understand his argument, but I do not agree with it. The truth is that at the moment our influence in the EU is limited to the technocratic size of our qualified majority vote, and we are frequently unable to get the changes we support for the pro-science conservation measures we want. When we leave the EU, our influence will be defined by the scale of our fisheries resource and the need of all those other European countries to have access to it. In future there will be a bilateral UK-EU annual fisheries negotiation, and the UK will be in a stronger position.

I apologise to those Members whose points I have not been able to address. Many other points were raised, but I hope they appreciate that time is short and I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall an opportunity to reply.

4.59 pm

**Mrs Murray:** We have heard 18 speeches by Back Benchers from all around the coast. I thank colleagues very much. I am sure that the Minister has got the message. I have one more for him: please do not sacrifice access to resources because you think you might get access to the market.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the UK fishing industry.

## Financial Inclusion

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(Craig Whittaker.)

5 pm

**Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the crucial subject of financial inclusion and the single financial guidance body. It has been more than two years since financial inclusion was considered by the House, in a Westminster Hall debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd). He applied for the debate to draw Members' attention to the invaluable work conducted by the Financial Inclusion Commission, the cross-party body on which he served. I have since had the honour of succeeding him in that role. The last two years have seen the publication of an excellent House of Lords Select Committee report into this issue.

We are approaching the halfway point to 2020 by when the commission still hopes to see a step change in financial inclusion. The commission's report covered a wide range of recommendations and demanded that, by 2020, every adult should have access to objective and understandable advice on credit, debt, savings and pensions. Among other objectives, it also called for a specific Minister to take the lead on financial inclusion and financial capability. I am delighted that a Minister with just those responsibilities will respond to this debate, and I know that his task is to break down silos across the Government on this important issue. I congratulate the original authors of the commission's report on achieving that objective, and I also congratulate the Minister. I know that he is deeply committed to this area and, as a former director of a credit union myself and the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on credit unions, I recognise a kindred spirit given his extensive work supporting credit unions in his constituency.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** It is a fair to say that the work of the Financial Inclusion Commission—I have met many of its members—needs to be recognised. In relation to credit unions, it is right that we pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done. Does he agree that we should laud the fact that credit unions now have 1.29 million members, that their members and loans have doubled since 2006, and that their deposits and assets have trebled? With respect, he is following on from the great work of my hon. Friends the Members for Worcester (Mr Walker) and for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), who were outstanding chairs of the all-party group before him.

**Jeremy Quin:** I am most grateful to the Minister. He raises a valuable point about credit unions, although they are not the focus of this debate. I do not wish to push my luck, but I hope we will have another opportunity to discuss them in the future.

The Minister is right about the progress that has been made since 2006. The increase from 2% to 3% in the interest rate allowed for credit unions has helped to make them more sustainable. It has permitted higher dividends, while ensuring that credit unions' borrowing rates are very competitive. Without wishing to go all Gilbert and Sullivan, there is something apt in making the punishment address the root of the crime, so I am delighted that funds recovered from convicted loan

sharks will, from next year, help to pay for incentives for credit union membership in the communities on which loan sharks prey.

A financially inclusive system is one that is fit for purpose for all in society, regardless of their economic status. It is one in which individuals can participate fully and not face punitive restrictions in the financial products that they can access. It is also a system in which measures are taken to help to prevent people from falling into a downward spiral of financial hardship.

Every constituency MP knows the scale of the issues. There are approximately 1.5 million unbanked adults in the UK. According to Citizens Advice research, 13.5 million adults have difficulty managing money and making financial decisions. The ONS found that in the first quarter of this year only 2% of income was put aside as savings. The savings of those who do have them are often woefully insufficient to deal with life's inevitable financial pressures—because of the breakdown of a washing machine or a car needed for work—through to more fundamental losses of income. The requirement for credit is therefore a given.

Financial exclusion can be further exacerbated by factors such as the high cost of credit and pay-as-you-go services. The commission estimated this poverty premium to be a cost of £1,300 a year to our poorest families. In the meantime, many from across the income spectrum lack good financial guidance at a time when the range and complexity of financial products has never been greater, and the need to make the right long-term decisions, in the light of increasing longevity, has never been more acute.

Financial inclusion is a huge topic, but the House will be pleased to hear that I intend to focus this debate on education, information and guidance. I was the a director of a credit union before entering this place, so I knew our sense of frustration—indeed, I am afraid, our sense of failure—at not being anywhere near as effective as we felt we should have been at persuading those in need of credit to use our cheaper community rates rather than accessing high-cost and high-risk lending.

The battle to ensure financial awareness has to start very early. I welcome the fact that the new national curriculum has made financial literacy statutory for the first time as part of citizenship education for 11 to 16-year-olds. I also recognise that improvements in basic maths, alongside the excellent results we have seen recently in literacy, are fundamental. However, I am afraid that focusing on secondary level may be too late. A report by the Money Advice Service found that financial habits are largely formed by the age of seven. Worryingly, a separate study by the Gambling Commission found that nearly half a million children as young as 11 are gambling weekly.

All we can do to increase financial literacy among children at primary school should be encouraged, and much can be done incrementally. I am aware that educational cartoons have been produced in Singapore and elsewhere to teach the basics of financial literacy at the very earliest ages. Simply having a single teacher in a school with the knowledge and understanding of how to teach financial literacy, who can act as a focus for provision inside that school, can be critical.

Any Member of this place knows how bewildering financial information can be to consumers. We all, in common with every citizens advice bureau in the country,

are aware of the dreaded presentation at advice surgeries of a carrier bag full of financial information, much of which will be highly complex. We need to harness modern technology to help to provide our citizens with clear information about their financial position so that we help them to make educated judgments. Nowhere is this more apparent or more pressing than on pensions. All too many people suffer the scandal of lost pensions, while countless others are unaware of their post-retirement financial position until it is too late. I certainly know of examples of lost pensions from my own constituency.

It was a real pleasure to serve on the Work and Pensions Committee in the last Parliament. Our first report after I became a member of that Committee was "Pension freedom guidance and advice", which highlighted the critical importance of the pensions dashboard for explaining clearly to consumers what they can expect and to ensure that they do not lose out.

I am delighted by the fresh impetus that the Minister has given the pensions dashboard. Bringing together data from 64 million pension pots is ambitious but necessary. Providing a single accurate and comprehensive source of pensions knowledge will be immensely useful to help to facilitate financial capability and retirement planning. I appreciate how complex a process this is and I have no wish to break the back of any camel. However, when the system is up and running, I want the concept to be extended to clarify for consumers with savings products, a mortgage or debts the full extent of their financial position, thereby helping them to plan accordingly.

On guidance, I welcome what is outlined in the Financial Guidance and Claims Bill and the Government's plans, which have broad cross-party support, to create a single financial guidance body. This, too, is in keeping with the recommendations of the Financial Inclusion Commission's report, and it has been welcomed by Which?, Citizens Advice and Age UK.

A lot of great work is conducted at a community level—I particularly draw hon. Members' attention to the valuable work conducted by the Horsham debt advice service—but the scale of this issue requires support on a national level. I have witnessed at first hand the excellent work carried out by the Money Advice Service, the Pensions Advisory Service and Pension Wise. They are all superb in their different ways, but I am certain that a single body will provide a more effective means by which to impart co-ordinated and consistent guidance.

I am at one with Citizens Advice in seeing three aspects of the Financial Guidance and Claims Bill as particularly positive: the new body will support only advice that is free at the point of use and is independent; it has an objective of targeting help at those most in need; and it has a remit to support joined-up services and to fill gaps, not to duplicate current provision. I am only too aware of the other pressures on time in this Chamber, but I look forward to the Bill's Second Reading in this place as soon as possible.

One of the Bill's provisions begins the process of implementing the Conservative manifesto commitment to provide a debt respite scheme. Under the terms of the Bill, the Secretary of State must, within three months of the establishment of the body, seek its advice on the establishment of such a scheme. That will be an early test, and one to which a great number of us look forward to the SFGB and the Government rising.

[Jeremy Quin]

This will be but one early example of the body's strategic function to support and co-ordinate the development of a national strategy to improve financial capability. The SFGB will have to rise to the challenge outlined in research by Which?, which shows that only 36% of consumers use Government advisory bodies as an information source about their financial options.

Advertising and effective resourcing are key to ensuring high uptake, particularly among the groups who would benefit most from accessibility. Financial exclusion disproportionately affects lone parents, single pensioners and the long-term sick and disabled, and the active recruitment of those people requires the effective use of Government funding.

I would also like pensions guidance made much more widely available. Without wishing to be indelicate, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can say that the services of Pension Wise, determined by age as they were, are available to our excellent Minister, but not, alas, to his excellent Parliamentary Private Secretary and nor, surprisingly, to myself. The younger the age range, the more effective this service will be.

I finish where I began. The SFGB will have a role in advancing financial inclusion, as will the new financial inclusion policy forum, which will be co-chaired by the Minister and the Economic Secretary. Especially at a point when the interest rate cycle is turning, financial inclusion is of critical importance. I welcome the moves by the Government that are under way, but I welcome still more the further reforms that I look forward to the Minister progressing.

5.11 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** It is a great pleasure to speak on behalf of the Government on the key issue of financial inclusion and the single financial guidance body, which we hope to bring before the House in the new year.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) for calling the debate and for the contribution he made as a step-in member of the Financial Inclusion Commission, following in the footsteps of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd). It is fair to say at the outset that I am deeply grateful to the commission's authors, and I have met many of them, including Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, who has been of great assistance to me in the five months I have been doing this job. He is part of the reason why we have a financial inclusion Minister at this stage.

It is an exciting time to be doing this job, in circumstances where we have over 8.5 million people automatically enrolled in a workplace pension and where we have the Financial Guidance and Claims Bill coming forward—it completed its passage through the House of Lords on 23 November, and it will come to this House in the new year. We are driving forward the points raised by my hon. Friend, whether on the pensions dashboard or the mid-life MOT.

I am particularly passionate about the need to address people's financial inclusion and capability. If I may briefly digress and talk about my personal circumstances, I co-founded a local community bank in my constituency, in the north-east. Our community bank was launched in November 2015 by the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu.

It was specifically tasked with trying to compete payday lenders out of business, as asked for by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. It has a small staff and an incredible team of local volunteers. It is fully accredited, with significant amounts of money deposited, and it makes low-cost loans to those who need them most.

I am no longer personally involved, because my ministerial role prevents me from doing so, but I do, as a Minister, want it to be my mission to champion such locally led positive solutions and to evangelise for savings and pensions. I pay tribute to all the staff who have helped so much in that institution.

The second institution I think it fair to thank is the Lords Committee that prepared a very detailed report in the 2016-17 Parliament on tackling financial exclusion. That was responded to by the Government recently. I pay tribute to the work the Committee has done addressing this issue. I also pay tribute to the Money Advice Service, the Pensions Advisory Service, Pension Wise and all their staff, because we would not be where we are today without their efforts. However, more particularly, those three organisations are particularly enthused by the opportunities that lie ahead with the single financial guidance body to address the issue we are all so keen to tackle: financial inclusion.

We are working very closely across the Government on this. It is sometimes argued—not, I accept, under this Government in any way whatsoever—that we exist in silos and that Departments do not necessarily speak to each other. I am particularly encouraged that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and Ministers in other Departments are equally committed to addressing financial inclusion, and that we have a forum coming together to be co-chaired by the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions. That shows that we are jointly addressing this key issue.

We need to provide people with access to the tools and services that they need to plan their lives and to avoid the unnecessary costs that come with financial exclusion. It is also important, however, that people are confident that the financial system itself will work for them—that there is responsible capitalism, that they will be protected from practices that are a threat to their finances and that they can make financial decisions themselves that are appropriate throughout their lives. The single financial guidance body will be the key addresser of financial capability in the United Kingdom. We realise that not enough people know how to manage their money effectively. This body will ensure that those people, especially those who are struggling, are easily able to access free and impartial guidance to help them to make more effective decisions about their pensions and their money and to seek advice on their debt.

There has been widespread support for the measures contained in the Bill, which passed on a cross-party basis in the House of Lords after significant amendment and improvement. It is a credit to the Houses of Parliament that a Bill that started out as 19 clauses emerged from the House of Lords with 31 clauses, considerably amended but with great support from individual peers on all sides, as was borne out by Lord Stevenson noting that the Bill was strengthened

“not because of any particular line or argument in a political or wider sense but because...as a result, the lives of people right around this country would be improved.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 November 2017; Vol. 787, c. 83.]

**Jeremy Quin:** I am grateful to the Minister for quoting Lord Stevenson, another member of the Financial Inclusion Commission, but I would like to bring my hon. Friend back to the importance of ensuring that this financial advice reaches those who need it most. I referred, for example, to the disabled, lone parents and single pensioners. It will be absolutely critical, as we measure the success of this body going forward, that it does reach the hardest-to-reach people who need its support the most.

**Guy Opperman:** It is interesting that my hon. Friend raises that point, because it was specifically addressed by their lordships in some detail. He will be aware that the new financial guidance body will simplify the existing public financial guidance landscape, making it easier for all people to access information and guidance.

Let me briefly address the statutory objectives and functions, because I think that that will reassure my hon. Friend on the point about those in society who are vulnerable. The single financial guidance body will have a number of statutory objectives: to improve the ability of people to make informed financial decisions; to support the provision of information, money and pensions guidance and debt advice in areas where it is specifically lacking; to ensure that information, guidance and debt advice is clear, cost-effective and not duplicated elsewhere; to ensure that information, guidance and debt advice is available to those most in need, particularly people in vulnerable circumstances; and to work with devolved authorities.

I stress that the chief executives of the three organisations—Michelle Cracknell, Jamey Johnson and Charles Counsell—all agree that bringing these organisations together and harnessing the product of the whole will enable specific opportunities to address this point. That is particularly appropriate given that one of the functions of the body is not only the protection of individuals as consumers but a strategic approach to ensure that this guidance is there. I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured that that is something that we massively support.

My hon. Friend raised financial education. The strategy behind the creation of the guidance body is to develop evidence that clearly shows which projects are successful and which are not. The Government want the body to prove what helps people to make better financial decisions throughout their lives, and then to deploy that understanding actively in its efforts in the area and share the knowledge as part of best practice.

The Government want the body to maximise the positive impact of financial education for children and young people, so that they are better prepared. We definitely see the guidance body taking forward the issue that my hon. Friend raises, to ensure that children are better prepared for financial challenges at any age. That strategic function is underpinned by the premise that, although Government bodies, industries, charitable functions and the voluntary sector are already doing excellent work, if they work together the impact will be that much greater.

I want to take the opportunity to celebrate the LifeSavers project, which I am pleased to say exists in my constituency. The organisation provides at primary level exactly the sort of thing that my hon. Friend described. The community bank of which I was a part is the provider of six LifeSavers programmes, which are supported by the

Church of England and Virgin Money. There is literally a bank in the school, educating children about the importance of finance, loans, deposits and long-term saving, which is the way ahead.

A large number of schools are part of that project, and we are evaluating its impact. It is Treasury-supported to a limited degree. I have visited participating schools, such as Hexham East First School in my constituency, and the difference that the programme makes is off the charts. My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has provided a great deal more money for maths education, more maths teachers and support across the curriculum to ensure that that key point is addressed on an ongoing basis.

Briefly, I will mention other areas of the Bill that address some of the points that my hon. Friend raised. I believe that we all accept that problem debt is an issue for too many people. The Conservative party manifesto set out the commitment that the Government would adopt a breathing space scheme, to allow someone in serious problem debt to apply for legal protection from further interest charges and enforcement action for a period of up to six weeks. The Financial Guidance and Claims Bill will enable the Government to introduce such a scheme.

The breathing space scheme builds on the local work of organisations such as those that my hon. Friend mentioned in Horsham. It sounds as though they are approaching the matter in an interesting way. The Bill will build on the existing work of the Financial Conduct Authority, which has instituted rules. Also relevant is the fact that in October, the Treasury published a call for evidence on breathing space, and evidence is still being taken on the best and most appropriate way forward. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, officials and I have met the people behind the operation of the scheme in Scotland, which has already introduced a debt respite scheme and breathing space scheme.

The key to inclusion is access to engagement with savings and pensions. Surely, the game-changer on that over the past five years is the development of auto-enrolment, as part of a cross-party approach down many years. It is one of the unseen success stories of successive Governments, and it has engaged individual consumers and members of the public to an astonishing degree and reversed generations of decline in savings and pensions. The statistics bear some contemplation. We are about to approach the point at which 9 million people are auto-enrolled in a workplace pension. Hundreds of thousands of individual employers have signed up to the scheme, and it has not only totally stopped the rot in relation to pensions but reversed a long-term decline.

We are conducting an auto-enrolment review to assess where we are with the programme, and we will be considering a number of key areas. Those include the existing coverage, how to achieve the right balance between enabling as many people as possible to save and ensuring that it makes economic sense for them to be included, how we can improve engagement and how to strengthen the evidence base around contributions to support future decisions on contribution rates. I will report the findings to Parliament before the end of the year. We hope that the review will provide a clear sense of direction as part of the ongoing conversation.

[Guy Opperman]

I want briefly to talk about the pensions dashboard, which is an important part of the conversation about how we can better use technology. Just as the private sector has reformed the travel industry, insurance and so many other business, such that we now go online to access information, so we believe that the same will bring pensions into the digital age. The dashboard is an opportunity to give people access to their pensions data in a clear and simple form by bringing together savings information in one place online. It is an opportunity to give more people a sense of ownership and control over their pensions. This is a complex process, but I look forward to a massive meeting of stakeholders on Monday, to which hon. Members are most definitely invited. The good news is that the Department for Work and Pensions is taking this forward. We are utterly committed to the ongoing feasibility study and believe that by placing consumers at the heart of our approach, the Government, working closely of course with industry, regulators and other interested parties—notably, consumer organisations—can achieve the goal of such accessibility.

I want to make a brief final point about the mid-life MOT. It has struck me in this job that although we address individual issues, in relation to our health and our ongoing status quo as human beings—my GP regularly, and rightly, contacts me with ways to improve my health—we do not address our finances in a similar way. The concept of the mid-life MOT, as pioneered by John Cridland in his outstanding state pension review, published earlier this year, could enable us to better encourage and support people in preparing for later life and retirement in a holistic way. I encourage all

private sector companies, through their human resources departments, to conduct mid-life MOTs—organisations such as Aviva are leading the way—and I certainly hope that the public sector will address those points as well. We believe that it is unquestionably a promising idea worth detailed scrutiny. Individual workers or employers could be provided with holistic advice and guidance to prepare for the gradual transition to retirement—whether at 45, 47 or 50—and it is something that the Government should be progressing.

It is often asked what brings us into politics. Social justice and financial inclusion are among the things that brought me into politics. When talk about the achievements of this Government and the coalition since my hon. Friend and my colleagues at my side—my hon. Friends the Members for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker) and for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones)—first entered the House of Commons, and when we talk about extending free childcare, improving schools results, introducing the national living wage, creating 3 million jobs, reducing income inequality and record high household incomes, we should remember that they are not just statistics, but steps towards tackling injustice and spreading opportunity. I believe passionately that the Bill will enable us to tackle financial inclusion. I welcome the work of those who have taken us this far on the journey, but I also welcome the opportunity to report to the House on the progress we have made and the opportunities that lie ahead to tackle this fundamental issue of social justice.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.28 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Thursday 7 December 2017

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

## Women in the House of Commons

[*Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the Women and Equalities Committee on 15 November 2017, on Women in the House of Commons, HC 507.*]

1.30 pm

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Fifth Report of the Women and Equalities Committee, Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 election, Session 2016-17, HC 630, and the Government Response, Cm 9492.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I thank the Liaison Committee for the opportunity to debate this important report, published by the Women and Equalities Committee in the last Session. I also thank my incredible Committee staff and all the witnesses who gave written and oral evidence. In particular, Professor Rosie Campbell, professor of politics at Birkbeck College, Professor Sarah Childs and Lord Hayward all gave a great deal of their time. I also thank the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Leader of the Opposition, and those other individuals who gave oral evidence.

In the 100 years since women were given the right to vote and stand for election, just 489 women have been elected to this place—I was the 265th, elected in 2005. Record numbers of women are in work and women are achieving record highs when it comes to education, but just a handful have had the opportunity to use their skills and expertise to represent their communities in this place. We have to ask ourselves whether that is a sign of a healthy democracy. Nothing can be more important than making sure that the institutions that are vital to our system of democracy are fit for purpose. They should function in a way that gives the electorate confidence that Parliament can make the laws that we need for a free and fair society.

Society changes, so Parliament has to change too. It is not an institution that can afford to place itself in aspic. It has to evolve to ensure that it truly represents the people we speak for and serve. That must involve recognising the changing role of women in society. Almost 100 years since legislation was passed to give some women the vote, it is timely to be debating this important report, considering what progress has been made, and ensuring that there is a clear pathway forward on the matter of women being elected to the House of Commons.

One point that emerged from the evidence session with senior representatives from the major parties in Westminster was that Parliament would be a better place if 50% of MPs were women. There is a growing understanding that although MPs represent all people in our communities, regardless of their sex or gender, women view the world through a different lens—the lens of having experienced life as a woman, and the associated differences that that involves. This place was established at a time when only men were allowed to dictate our laws and shape the future of our country.

Our political parties were shaped then too. The Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry has set out a number of recommendations that members of the Committee felt would do more than simply try to retrofit women into Parliament, instead allowing them to play a truly equal role—something that we are still very far away from achieving and can only really achieve through a step change.

The 2016 inquiry focused on what the Government, political parties, the House of Commons and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority could do to ensure better female representation in the House of Commons in 2020 and beyond. It was launched in the context of the Boundary Commission review and the proposed reduction in the number of House of Commons seats. When the inquiry was launched, women held 30% of seats in the Commons, and the UK was ranked 48th globally for representation of women in legislatures. A lot has changed since then, but a great deal of the report remains extremely pertinent.

We found that Parliament should actively encourage women to participate in democracy, and should continue to look at ways to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to women coming here to represent the people who voted for them. We found that political parties had the primary responsibility to ensure that women come forward to represent them. Although the political parties have measures in place to help to achieve equality in gender representation, we felt that there was insufficient analysis of how effective those measures actually were, and that in all the parties there was a lack of clear strategy and leadership to achieve gender equality and representation.

The Committee made some quite radical recommendations. We recommended that the Government set a domestic target of 45% representation by women in Parliament by 2030. We recommended that they introduce a statutory minimum proportion of female parliamentary candidates in general elections—that target should be at least 45%, given the current deficit—with sanctions for political parties if it was not achieved. We also recommended bringing into force section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, requiring political parties to publish the data on diversity for general elections, and continuing the measures that allow things like all-women shortlists.

The Committee suggested that political parties take greater ownership of this issue, make gender balance in candidate selection a real priority, and accept that they have primary responsibility for making sure that the House of Commons is a more diverse place. We suggested that they publicly set out the measures that they plan to take to increase the proportion and number of female parliamentary candidates at the next election, and that they adopt, fund and promote training so that women can achieve those goals. We suggested that the parties should provide support for younger women and women entering politics for the first time, and that there should be a clear sense of direction towards increasing female representation in parliamentary parties, ensuring that their leaders work more closely with national decision-making bodies and local associations to deliver that.

The Government's response was quite startling. They rejected all six of our recommendations. I do not mind if people reject one or two of them, but not all six at a time when we are still nowhere near equality. I am really pleased to have secured today's debate, and that my

[*Mrs Maria Miller*]

colleague from Hampshire—my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes)—is the Minister responding on behalf of the Government. In Hampshire, we have actually done an amazing thing: about 40% of our Members of Parliament are women. We know how to do it there; we just need to do it nationally.

The Government did not support the use of legislative quotas or sanctions on parties to achieve gender balance in the Commons. I know that that is a philosophical approach. They emphasised that political parties had the primary responsibility for improving representation in the Commons. Although the Government stated that they were ready to support parties on approaches to improve diversity, they did not detail how. I was struck that they rejected the idea of enacting section 106 of the Equality Act, which would make the number of women from political parties standing for election transparent, at the same time as they were asking businesses to implement gender pay gap reporting mechanisms, which were intended to create transparency about the role of women in business and their ability to progress. I realise that gender pay gap reporting is something done by larger businesses, so perhaps the Minister could explain why we could not just ask the larger parties to report in line with section 106 of the Equality Act. That would be a way of getting started.

Unfortunately, a general election then happened, which meant that our report, which was carefully crafted around the prospect of a 2020 general election, was slightly thrown up into the air. It is good, however, that at the election earlier this year we saw the highest number and proportion of female MPs ever recorded in the UK—208 out of 650 MPs, making up about 32% of seats.

We need to put this in context. Membership of the House of Commons is not infinite. It is actually quite small—it is just 650 people—so a big change in the proportion of women requires quite a small change in numerical terms. Specifically, to achieve a 50:50 Parliament, we need only 117 more women to be elected at the next general election. Nobody would argue that there are not 117 incredibly capable women in this country who would be able to take over from some of the men who are here at the moment—with the greatest respect to all of my male colleagues. To achieve that, all political parties need a plan, and transparency needs to be at the heart of those plans. It is the responsibility of Parliament as an organisation to evolve into a place that everybody can thrive in. I pay tribute to Mr Speaker's work in establishing the House of Commons reference group, which I and a number of other Members sit on, to look at the workings of the House and to make it easier for a more diverse group of people—not just women—to come here to work.

We also have to be realistic about the external factors that can dissuade women from seeking public office, including becoming an MP. To that end, the Women and Equalities Committee took some further oral evidence from the political parties on 15 November 2017 as a result of the inquiry. I want to draw out a couple of themes from that additional evidence. Do the parties have a plan? Based on that evidence session, I would still say that the situation is mixed. I cannot put my finger on an exact plan that any of the parties talked about, so there is more work to do there.

I am still looking for more encouragement from the Minister that the Government will press forward on transparency and the collection and publication of diversity data. The Conservative party said it hopes to publish more data. The Liberal Democrats, the Labour party and the Scottish National party agreed that it would be helpful for the Government to bring into force section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, although the Labour party raised a number of issues about how the data would be gathered. Again, they said that it was the smaller parties' fault that it was not being brought into force, so we thought we would write to the smaller parties and ask them whether it would be an enormous burden to enforce section 106 of the 2010 Act. So far, we have not been overwhelmed with negative responses. We will be looking at that issue further, and if the so-called smaller parties that are represented here today want to voice any opinions on that, that would be incredibly helpful. We will analyse how we can overcome some of those apparent problems through the drafting of secondary legislation. It is not beyond the wit or man—or indeed woman—to do that.

The second issue that came out of our further oral evidence was the culture, which still causes many women concerns about coming to work in this place. The witnesses talked about cultural factors blocking women's aspirations to take on leadership roles and become Members of Parliament. The Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party agreed that late-night voting in Westminster—a topical thing to talk about, given that we were voting at midnight this week for no apparent reason—is a barrier to women's coming forward. They said that voting could perhaps be organised in a different way. We often call it a family-friendly way, but I call it a human-friendly way, because I am not sure there are many individuals who think it is possible to work in the way we do without it having some impact on their capacity.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Lady for bringing this timely and hugely important debate to the Chamber. On the matter of voting, does she agree that there are models in the devolved nations? In the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Parliaments, there is a seat for every Member and electronic voting. It takes two seconds to press a button in Holyrood in Scotland, yet it takes us 15 minutes to walk through the Lobby. A huge amount of time and public money is being wasted.

**Mrs Miller:** I am not sure I totally agree with the hon. Lady on that issue. Like in many corporate organisations, we benefit from talking to and interacting with each other, and votes are often the only way we can do that because we are spread out doing many different things. I do not think the mechanism of voting is a bad thing. I just do not understand why we cannot do it on a more regularised basis.

The issues that prevent women from thriving in business—I was at a conference this morning held by the Trades Union Congress talking about that very issue—include irregularity and the lack of certainty about what a business might ask of them. That is not just a problem for women; people generally want more certainty. Everybody would say that there is some latitude when we are debating incredibly important things such

as the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. On those matters we need to ensure we are all there when we are needed to vote, but that is not necessary on every single piece of legislation and on things that are not so time-specific. I hope the Government and their Whips Office are considering how they can make the way we operate in this place appear as if we are at least in the 20th century, if not the 21st century. Holding late-night votes on just any business should have gone out with the ark.

The other cultural issue that came up is the representation of women on party decision-making bodies. The Labour party, which gave evidence to us in November, aims to have a gender-balanced party conference and National Executive Committee—I am sure Labour Members understand what that means more than I do—but other parties were more uncertain about that. They all offered to write to us, and we will look carefully at their submissions, but if there is not gender-balanced representation on parties' decision-making bodies, it is likely that having more women in Parliament will not be seen as such a pressing issue. I hope all parties will write to my Committee with their views on that.

The next issue that was raised—it is important to set this out in my opening speech—is the working environment here in Parliament. Clearly, impropriety in behaviour is still in the headlines this week. All parties have a code of conduct for Members of Parliament. Labour and the Conservative party have recently strengthened theirs, and all parties have been asked to write to the Committee outlining their procedures for reporting inappropriate behaviour. I look very positively at the way the parties reacted to earlier issues that were raised.

The final point, which is very important, is the abuse and harassment of parliamentary candidates. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) is not a candidate, I was shocked at what she experienced this week. A coffin was put outside the parliamentary office in her constituency as part of a “family-friendly” event. People have to think very carefully about the abuse and harassment that parliamentary candidates experience. That sort of behaviour towards elected representatives has to be rejected. We asked the parliamentary parties to write to us to tell us how many party members have been expelled or suspended for abusing or harassing parliamentary candidates. We need a zero-tolerance approach. I applaud Members of all parties who stand up for their colleagues here, regardless of party.

In conclusion, the Select Committee is already working to follow up on the report, which we see as a continuing part of our work. This Parliament does not look like our country, in particular when it comes to women. Ninety-nine years ago this month, the first woman sat as a Member of Parliament. I am incredibly proud that next year we will be celebrating Nancy Astor, a Conservative Member of Parliament, as the first woman here.

It fills me with great pride that my party has given this country the first two female Prime Ministers, both extraordinary women. Margaret Thatcher made me interested in politics at a time when few other people could do so; and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) has not shirked from taking our country through the most politically challenging period of modern history—our exit from the European Union. Everyone knows her tenacity as this country's longest-serving Home Secretary and her commitment

to get more women elected to this place by establishing Women2Win. In my parliamentary career, my right hon. Friend has been a friend, a mentor and a champion for thousands of women in the Conservative party, and we all owe her a debt of gratitude.

My point is that each party has a story to tell about women in the party—and we should tell it—but no party has found the holy grail. No party in this place can claim to have equality for women, and each has a different set of problems. This debate needs to be honest about that. Each party needs to explain better how it will ensure equality for women in the future.

1.51 pm

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Party leaders and most MPs share the objective of achieving equal representation. Almost all of them also accept that there is more to do in order to succeed.

The recent general election put the number of women in the House of Commons up to 208. That is just short of double where we were in 2001, when there were only 118 female MPs. Progress is not as fast as I believe we need it to be, but there is progress to be celebrated nevertheless.

To draw on my own experience, I first interned in the House of Commons 17 years ago—

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): You don't look old enough!

**Tulip Siddiq**: I thank my hon. Friend. People would stare at me because they were not used to seeing, for a start, women under 5 feet, or loud-mouthed women of colour working in Parliament. I went on to work as a researcher, a press officer and a special adviser, and then left Parliament and came back as an MP.

In every layer of the party that I have described, whether special adviser, press officer or researcher, I always stuck out like a sore thumb. It fills me with a lot of pride and a sense of joy when I walk down the corridors now and see the difference in Parliament. Again, I will emphasise that we have not reached where we need to be, but there is no doubt about the big difference in Parliament now from what I saw 17 years ago.

My worry about the report is that the burden of progress seems to have been entirely assigned to political parties and that certain courses of action that could help, such as quotas and targets, are ruled out entirely out of hand. That concerns me. At a time of such major constitutional upheaval for the country, I feel that this place could show its determination to truly equip Britain for the future by putting women on an equal footing, and at a time when we are led by a female Prime Minister.

The recent oral evidence given before the Women and Equalities Committee revealed that entrusting political parties with that task will produce limited results. The Government should take the matter away from party bureaucracy, with all the delays and compromises that such a route entails, but their response to the report clearly rejects the imposition of targets, so I want to make a few alternative suggestions.

First, the prevailing culture in Westminster deters women from joining. Authorities must be up front about that and willing to take action when required. Secondly, outreach programmes must be considered as an apolitical way of making Westminster more attractive

[*Tulip Siddiq*]

not only to women but to black and minority ethnic communities. Thirdly, Parliament must be proactive about ensuring that equal representation is enshrined in the new democratic contests that take place—that is not only parliamentary elections, but mayoral or police and crime commissioner ones. We need improvement at all levels, in different kinds of elections.

Parliament needs to be proactive in fostering an environment that does not put people off even before they have contemplated a career in public service. I am sure everyone in the Chamber will join me in expressing the horror that we felt about the accounts of harassment. Clearly we must deal with the aspects of this place that create a hostile environment for women. All parties working together on something we all care deeply about will deliver a confidential and independent complaints service and a procedure for victims to have their voices heard and their complaints dealt with properly. I hope that extends to people who visit the parliamentary estate, as well as those who work here.

When dealing with the cultural problems of the Commons, we must also look at the behaviour of Members in debates—Members of all political parties, I accept, not just one—and the bureaucratic structures that discriminate against women. As the Committee's report notes, a 2015 survey from the Administration Committee explored experiences of working in Parliament, finding that "the unappealing culture of Westminster...deterred women from standing as parliamentary candidates."

Whether that is hon. Members barking like dogs at women who are speaking in debates, or the centuries-old voting systems that prevent new mothers from representing their constituents, the authorities must accept the fundamental link between the prevailing culture of the Commons and the continued under-representation of women within it.

As an MP for a London constituency, I often speak at schools, including all-girls schools, where women will ask me whether it is uncomfortable being a young woman in politics. I always hesitate, because I do not know whether to tell them the truth and deter them from joining politics or to say, "Hand on heart, I believe this place is welcoming for young women." I do not want to feel like that. When I go into a school and am questioned about whether I would encourage young women to come into politics, I want to be able to say with a clear conscience, "Yes, this is a welcoming place. Yes, here you won't face any discrimination. Yes, it'll be as easy for you as it is for the male student sitting next to you." That is the problem I face in schools. We need to talk about this problem but at the same time, if students from Hampstead and Kilburn are listening: I do not want to deter you from coming into politics.

I also want to pick up a little on intersectionality. We are talking about women, but we cannot separate that from the fact that there is more discrimination against women of colour. That must be part of the debate if we want to secure equal representation in Parliament. We now have 51 BME MPs in the Commons, since the 10 who were elected at the 2017 general election. That increase is welcome, not least because it includes my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), the first female Sikh MP, and for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), who is registered blind as well as being a woman and a woman of colour.

We have come far, but I still want to make another point. Especially in the context of this Parliament's make-up, I want to look at an important part of Parliament: Select Committees. There are 28 departmental and specified Select Committees in total. Only nine of the Chairs are women, and not a single Chair of a Select Committee is from a BME background. To me, in a Parliament like this, that is really shocking.

The number of BME MPs make up 7.8% of the new Parliament, which still does not reflect the population at large, where the figure is 14%. I come back to that Select Committee point, however: it is not just about having MPs in Parliament who are BME, but about what positions they hold. Are they party leaders, or in the Cabinet or shadow Cabinet? Are they the Chairs of Select Committees? The answer to the last question is: no, there are no BME Chairs of Select Committees.

To go back to the report, the rejection of quotas for women was disappointing, and so was the omission of a formal response to the Committee's recommendation for Parliament to lead outreach initiatives. The Committee provided the Government with an opportunity to think boldly and to deliver an apolitical advocacy programme that could sell the virtues of life in Westminster to under-represented groups. By encouraging the political participation of traditionally marginalised and hard-to-reach groups, we can help to bring that focus to the forefront. In the end, diversifying candidates diversifies policies.

**Mrs Miller:** As a fellow colleague on the Select Committee, I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution to the work that we do. The educational outreach that Parliament does is fantastic, so one could argue that we already have an apolitical programme that hopefully is encouraging young people to be MPs in future. What the Committee suggested was really just an extension of that, was it not?

**Tulip Siddiq:** Yes, and I pay tribute to the right hon. Lady as Chair of the Committee. The Committee works very well together and constructively, and its members are from all political backgrounds—people have different viewpoints, but we do a good job. She is absolutely right. What we want is an extension of something that already exists. We do not think it is a huge ask. I fear that, given the progress required, until statutory enforcement is seriously considered even for just an interim period, we will not achieve our goals.

I will not take up too much more time because I know that lots of Members want to contribute to this important debate. Speaking as an ex-councillor, representing constituents at ward level provided me with experience and the belief that I could go on to do that on a constituency-wide basis. As such, the Committee's recommendation that the Government update the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 to allow all-women shortlists for all elected mayoral and police and crime commissioner posts seems like a sensible proposal. The Government say that the evidence base for taking such a step is as yet under-developed. Since 2002, only two of the Labour party's 18 elected Mayors have been women. The Select Committee report shows that, in every major party, less than 40% of councillors are women. The evidence base seems to be the opposite of underdeveloped.

The Government leave the door open by saying that they will consider the issue further. I hope they will do just that. In all the three areas that I have discussed, I truly hope that the Committee's report will prompt the Government to take the lasting top-down steps required to deliver the equal representation that we are all hoping for.

I will be a bit cheeky and follow the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who paid tribute to the Prime Minister. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), because if it was not for her encouraging me to stand, and if it was not for the informal networks that are created among women who came to the House before I did, who told me over and over that I could be the MP for Hampstead and Kilburn, I would not be standing here today.

2.3 pm

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): It is grossly unfair to have to follow that speech. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) secured this debate. I need to begin with an apology: unfortunately, I need to get to the Education Centre for 2.50 pm, because the only college in my constituency is sending a big group of students down and I need to speak to them to convince them that this is a place they could come to.

I want to begin with a brief explanation of how I ended up on the Women and Equalities Committee and speaking today. I grew up in Birmingham with five brothers and I went to an all-boys school. I grew up in an Irish Catholic community that was constituted almost entirely of men who worked in the construction industry, so it is no surprise that I went on to study civil engineering at university and, after I graduated, I went to work on a building site. I managed to avoid virtually any contact with women—in a professional or other capacity—in college, at university and in the workplace until I was about 25 or 27. Then, I joined an American property company and about 70% of the people who worked there were women. That was a complete revelation. Having been brought up, not through any fault of my own, in a society that had seen women in a slightly subservient role—except of course my mother, who had been ruthless in ruling her six lads—I suddenly found that there were women employed right across the organisation at all levels of seniority, who in many cases were considerably more brilliant than any of the men I had met previously. I realised that there was something strange in the world as I had experienced it.

Up to that point, I had been conditioned in a particular way, and since then I have felt that it is my duty and obligation to speak out for women because the world is unfair and it needs correcting. I do not think that the world is unfair simply in terms of politics. In 1991, 3% of consultant surgeons in the UK were female. There has been a massive, transformational change since then; 25 years later, the figure is 11.1%. The University of Exeter did some work to see why that was the case. It is definitely not that women surgeons are any less committed than their male counterparts or any less dedicated or skilled at their trade; it is simply that they feel that they will pursue the career choice that seems to give them the best opportunity for success. According to the university, what they need is excellent role models, for them to see that it is possible for them to achieve that status.

The situation in the police obviously has to be much better—but no, unfortunately it is not. In 1995, which does not seem very long ago, the first woman chief constable, Pauline Clare, was appointed to Lancashire Police Force. What has happened since then? In 2016, out of 43 forces, there were four women chief constables. How can that be the case? It gets worse: the year before, there were eight. So what happened in the meantime? A few of those women decided to step down. Jane Sawyers, the Staffordshire chief constable, said:

“Either disproportionately female Chief Constables are less competent than their male counterparts, which is simply not the case, or there is something sexist about how female leaders are viewed.”

It is not just about representation in this House; women are unequally represented across several professions, and something has to be done. The butt of my case is that I do not think that quotas are the answer to that. Would hon. Members want to be operated on by a female surgeon who got the job because that hospital needed to achieve its quota of surgeons for that case? No, I do not think so. There are brilliant women surgeons out there; they can be appointed because of their brilliance, their ability and their dedication, but they do not need to be there because of quotas.

**Hannah Bardell:** The hon. Gentleman is making a very powerful and interesting speech. We may have the debate about the good, the bad and the indifferent, but does he not agree with quotas as a short-term measure to redress the balance? Are we really saying that more than 50% of the population are not able to do exactly the same jobs as men?

**Eddie Hughes:** Yes and no. I am absolutely not saying that women are not able to do as good a job as men. The clue to my disagreement is in the way the hon. Lady phrased the question, by saying “short term”. I do not want a short-term solution; I want a sustainable, long-term solution. I appreciate that it may seem naive and idealistic of me to view it that way.

I look at the Benches opposite and I am particularly terrified of the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), because on Monday I will be on “The Politics Show” with her. I appreciate that she is an experienced, incredibly able Member, and I will look decidedly puny in political terms by comparison, so I am starting my preparation now in earnest and I hope that she has a bad day. I see members of the Women and Equalities Committee who I have grown to know over the past few months who are equally brilliant. I do not feel for one minute that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) needed an all-women shortlist to get to that position.

**Mrs Miller:** May I say first how much my hon. Friend brings to the Women and Equalities Committee? His passion for these issues is apparent to everyone. He said that there is a cornucopia of women with the ability to do jobs—even in the construction industry. Does he not see that although we may have a large pool of capable women, they are not able to progress because of the way their competencies are judged? Does he agree that there needs to be a focus on removing barriers to women progressing? That might be done in this place through all-women shortlists, which would not allow substandard people to come through, but would create a level playing field of opportunity.

**Eddie Hughes:** My right hon. Friend makes a very valid point, which I was kind of coming to. I maintain my resistance to quotas, but what can we do to change the situation? Well, I can do my tiny bit. I begin early: when I visit primary schools, I encourage women—young children—by saying, “You can aspire to be whatever you want to be.” Obviously, I represent a working-class constituency and I am a working-class lad. From a social point of view, I say to people, “You can become an MP. I’ve managed it and I’m happy to help you do it.” I can say to the girls in the class, “Look, we’ve had two outstanding woman Prime Ministers, and I can point to several other examples who can be your inspiration and help you with your aspirations.”

We need to reach out to girls and encourage them, but we need to do that with lads as well. We need to say to them, “You need to understand that these girls sitting next to you are your equals.” That conditioning needs start early. We need to destroy the stereotype of men being the breadwinners and women the carers. That needs to be dealt with at an early age. That will lead to a better society, not just by helping us with representation but by helping to reduce sexism and sexual harassment of women, because it will mean that men do not see themselves in the superior role that they may otherwise have been preconditioned to see themselves in.

We should encourage girls, and then we should back campaigns such as the 50:50 #AskHerToStand campaign. We should catch brilliant women early and encourage them to take part, but we must also ensure that men do their bit with regard to child rearing and parental responsibility. The Committee has done brilliant work on that. Imagine a future five or 10 years from now where it is completely normal for parenting duties to be shared equally between men and women. Having that engagement with their kids would be better for men and better for the kids, and it would mean a more equal playing field. In interviews, people would not ask themselves, “Can I recruit this woman? She may become pregnant and then she’ll have childcare responsibilities,” but would see men and women in parity and think, “It makes no difference whether I recruit a man or a woman—their obligations to the family will be the same.”

If we can level the playing field, we will go a long way to making it easy for women not just to become the brilliant parliamentarians of the future, but to run surgeries, to run our police forces and to contribute generally to society. There has to be parity. Women are amazing.

2.13 pm

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes). I agree with much of what he said—not all, but he has given me some good food for thought and debate.

Like other Members, I will start by talking about my background. I was brought up by a single mother. My brother and I had very strong female role models. I often worried that he had few male role models, because my grandad died when he was eight, but he is now a proud father and partner and I can see that the female influence in his life has been hugely important.

It is important that we identify that the success of women and gender equality is as much for and about men as it is for and about women. It will benefit society.

I always think about the reports that I read following the banking crisis about the demographics of the people who made the decisions in that sector. We might say they were a very homogeneous group: they were the same race, gender and class, and they all looked at one another and did not see the faults in the system. I am not trying to blame the whole financial crash on men, but had there been more diversity—this is not my view; it is from the reports produced after the crash—there would have been different ideas and people would have challenged one another in different ways.

I think it is fair to say that the same applies very much to government, business and society. Where there is one type of people, they are more likely to agree than disagree. It is much better to have people of different religions, sexualities, genders and abilities around the decision-making table, because that makes for better decision-making processes.

I take the hon. Gentleman’s point about quotas and long-term solutions, but surely he recognises that structural challenges still exist for women who seek to get into positions of power. He referenced all-female shortlists. I will talk a little about what the Scottish National party has done in that respect, but all-women shortlists have brought us Members such as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). I cannot imagine her not being in this place and not being a vociferous champion of gender equality. I am sure she will be able to comment about this, but I have not seen anyone cast that up to her at any point. She is here and in her place, like many others.

I reflect on a comment by a friend who works high up in the corporate world. We met at an event in Parliament and she said, “Women will have equality when they’re able to get into positions of power in the same way as their average male counterparts have been able to.” This is somewhat derogatory towards men, but she said, “For generations, average men have got into positions of power. Women will have equality when they have the right to be just as average.” Let us not set the bar too low but say, “Actually, we can all be better, but there are structural challenges.”

I worked in the oil industry before I came to this place. Many decisions were made on the golf course, in the pub or in nightclubs. I remember going to an interview to be a sales representative and saying categorically that I was not willing to take clients to strip clubs as part of engagement. The response I got was, “Oh, well that doesn’t really happen any more,” but it was clear that it still happened. It was still common practice in the part of the sector that I was working in, and it was something that I was unwilling to do.

I did not get that job. I do not believe that was because of that comment, and I do not suggest that it was, but there were certain practices, and certain comments were made to me. I remember a sales guy I worked with saying to me about someone who was on maternity leave, “I don’t want that girl back in my team. How long is it going to be before she has another child?” I said, “Hang on a minute. Apart from that being completely illegal, how would you feel if someone said that to your wife and excluded her from the workforce?” He had obviously never considered that. He saw his opinion in a vacuum.

I came to this place largely because I had been involved in politics before. My colleague the former right hon. Member for Gordon, Alex Salmond, who I

worked for in a previous capacity, encouraged me to stand. In 2010, my mother stood unsuccessfully in the Livingston constituency for election to the House of Commons, so in 2015 I got the pleasure of beating the man who had beaten my mum five years before. I have to say that was a great experience. He was a really nice chap and we had a very respectful campaign, but beating the person who had beaten my mother was a proud moment, and I am proud to represent the constituency that I grew up in.

West Lothian is split into two Westminster constituencies and two Scottish Parliament constituencies, and 75% of the representatives of those constituencies—three out of the four—are women. Here is another interesting statistic: of the 12 candidates that the SNP has fielded in West Lothian for Holyrood and Westminster elections since 2007, nine have been women and three have been men, and we have not used any gender balancing mechanisms.

Let me summarise what the SNP has done in recent years. Members will all be aware that Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, is a woman and has a gender-balanced Cabinet—one of less than a handful in the world. Scotland has very much led the way on that front.

At the SNP spring conference in March 2015, we passed a new mechanism to encourage more women to stand as candidates at the 2016 Scottish Parliament election: where an incumbent SNP constituency MSP announces their intention to stand down, the national executive committee may direct an all-women shortlist. That resulted in 43% of SNP MSPs being women—an increase from I think just over 20% in 2011. Similarly, we looked at all-women shortlists for local government elections where the party was standing more candidates than sitting councillors, and in a ward where the party had one sitting councillor, it stood two candidates, at least one of whom had to be a woman.

I am not saying that we are perfect by any stretch of the imagination—34% of our parliamentarians here at Westminster are female. It is incumbent on us all not just to look at this from a party structure perspective but, as the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) said, to look at this place. We look around this place in terms of its family-friendliness or female-friendliness, and we recognise that men and women are different in their approaches to work and atmosphere. I sometimes walk around the Palace and think, “It is not the most friendly place to work.”

I take the right hon. Lady’s point about the Lobby, our voting mechanism and being able to network, but surely we can find a way by which Members can discuss and relate to each other, other than through the voting Lobby. Votes take 15 minutes, and I think we have 10 votes coming up at the end of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill Committee. That will take us more than two hours. We can think about the time, effort and public money spent on drafting and tabling amendments to Bills, and I remember that there were hundreds of amendments to the Scotland Bill, but we are able to press only a handful of them to a vote. I wonder how much public money, time and energy is being wasted because we cannot press amendments to legislation to a vote because votes take so long. We are missing out on opportunities to amend legislation, and by extension our democracy is being affected.

**Tulip Siddiq:** I thank the hon. Lady for her speech. I have long argued for e-voting, because I believe that is the right way for us to go forward. Does she think it quite strange that the reason I was given for not introducing e-voting was that all Members need to be in the Chamber to listen to the debate—even though 650 Members of Parliament do not fit in the Chamber at the same time?

**Hannah Bardell:** The hon. Lady makes an excellent point; I am sure that irony is not lost on anyone here or anyone watching at home. We must look at those structural aspects. When there was a discussion about the refurbishment of the building, we suggested that perhaps it would be more financially efficient to build a new Parliament that was fit for purpose and turn this place into a museum. I know that is a controversial view, but at some point we will have to realise that this place does not reflect modern working practices in terms of the technological advances, e-voting and digital voting, however that comes. Even proxy voting is being considered for maternity and paternity baby leave. I remember seeing a Labour Member in the Tea Room during a vote breastfeeding her child. I thought, “This is absolute madness. This Member has had to travel from her constituency to vote—because it is such an important vote—and she has to bring her child with her.” I do not have any children—I would love to have children—but I think, “How would I manage that logistically?” It would be a huge challenge.

The Government have not accepted any of the report’s recommendations. That is disappointing. Surely they can find it in their heart, as a token of good will and progression, to take at least some of those sensible recommendations. The Fawcett Society said that, “37% of seats at-risk in the Boundary Review are held by women, which is substantially more than the percentage of women in Parliament—only 29.6%”.

Let us not forget that up until the previous Parliament, the number of men in each Parliament was greater than the number of women who had ever been elected. That is staggering.

We are in Westminster Hall, just across from the broom cupboard where Emily Wilding Davison hid on the night of the 1911 census. We can think about the struggle, and I often think about the representation of women and women’s suffrage in Parliament. The new art installation is fantastic, but some of those representations of the women’s movement and women’s suffrage are really subverted and subdued. More could be done in that regard.

I come to some of the most amazing women we have had in Parliament. It is 50 years since Winnie Ewing, our dear friend and colleague, was elected. We stand on her shoulders, and we can read the stories in her biography. Given that we are now sadly leaving the European Union—unless something dramatic happens; who knows?—she will be the only one who will have been a Member of this place, a Member of the European Parliament and a Member of the Scottish Parliament. That is a major achievement. I pay tribute to Winnie, because

“stop the world, Scotland wants to get on”

is a line that will live in infamy. I know it inspires many of us, and she has inspired many of us.

[*Hannah Bardell*]

We are the architects and the agitators of change. We should stand proud as women, and men who are supporting women to stand for election, but we must not pull up that ladder behind us; we must extend it out for the next generation.

2.26 pm

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your stewardship again, Mr Sharma. I also give apologies: I have a train to catch heading north, so I need to be away by 3 o'clock.

**Jess Phillips**: Typical men!

**Bill Grant**: I have the dinner to make when I get home as well. First, I must advise of my CV. My mother was a woman and I married a woman as far back as 1970—that reminds me: it was on 19 December. I also have two daughters and one of my grandchildren is a lovely young lady. I am indeed a very fortunate individual.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), I went to an all-boys' secondary school, which isolated me from the fairer sex—or the other gender. I also worked for 31 years in a male-dominated organisation: the fire service in Strathclyde. As a senior officer, I had the great privilege of working with a female deputy chief officer. It was a privilege to serve with her—I hope it was a privilege for her—and to improve that service. I welcome the involvement of women in male-dominated services such as the fire service and the police service, to which he referred.

Women in the House of Commons are welcome, but let us not legislate for gender balance, even in the short term. We saw good progress on female representation in the House of Commons in the 2017 election, with record numbers of female MPs elected: 208 in total, accounting for 32%. The Conservative party fielded a record 184 female candidates in the election, 32% of the total, which is an improving record that we are proud of. Labour, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats also had record numbers of female candidates in the election.

Some 51 years ago in 1966, when Harold Wilson won the election, there were just 26 female MPs. Today's figure of 208 reflects, if my calculation is right, a 700% increase in those years. Some would say that is very good.

**Jess Phillips**: Does the hon. Gentleman know which party made the most progress and why that progress was made?

**Bill Grant**: The hon. Lady will be glad that I am not on her quiz team, because I do not know the answer. If she wishes to tell us—[*Interruption.*] I am sure she will. I think she would agree that that is significant progress over 50 years, but it is probably not fast enough.

The Conservatives have a great track record, having secured not one but two excellent female Prime Ministers. I am sure history will treat kindly their contribution to women in politics, both here in the United Kingdom and probably around the world. In Scotland, until recently, three key party leaders were female. That must be applauded, though the hat-trick has changed with

the arrival of Labour's new leader in Scotland, Mr Richard Leonard, with Ms Dugdale testing the water for a future in television. I think her excursion was relatively short-lived, but I wish her well.

I am pleased to advise of the Conservative organisation Women2Win, mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), which was co-founded by the Prime Minister, ably supported by Ruth Davidson, my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) and many others. It is good to know that we have a passionate advocate for female representation resident at No. 10.

The way forward in increasing female representation in Parliament has no single solution, but in my view much of the remedy lies with political parties, not legislation. Each party must try to attract the right female candidates, giving them support and encouragement, as was said earlier on. The Conservative Women2Win is but one proud example. We must look, as was also mentioned earlier, to the pool of talent of people involved in politics. We all have phone bankers, leaflet deliverers, staff and door knockers, many of whom are female, who keep many local associations of all parties alive in our communities. They help to secure our seats here in Westminster. Let us encourage them and others from a whole range of backgrounds to come forward.

As elected Members, each of us has a role to play in ensuring that the working environment at Westminster is indeed welcoming and human-friendly, as was said earlier, and safe and secure for all who take on the challenge of public office. We must learn and move on from the recent barrage of allegations that undermine the good work of most parliamentarians of all parties. Part of our role as elected parliamentarians is to be ambassadors for Parliament and to encourage female participation in our rich democracy. Having sat in Parliament for only a few months, I know female Members have a lot to give to democracy. Let us all contribute to a fairer and better Parliament, hang up the old school tie, if I dare say it, and strive for better progress in gender balance. Diversity can only strengthen democracy.

2.31 pm

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I want to pay tribute to all who have spoken, with some special tribute to my colleague the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes). Like him, I grew up in a family in Birmingham, I have only brothers—obviously we make boy babies in Birmingham, because I also have two of those—and I grew up with an Irish heritage. I certainly have the same touch of the Blarney that he has. My experience and my views are different from his, but I know we have the same goal.

In case there is any question whether the Labour party feels that what happened in Totnes with a coffin was appropriate, I will self-appoint myself as spokesman for the Labour party and say that it is totally unacceptable to have political debate that leads to a Member of Parliament having a coffin put outside her office. It is especially unacceptable in regard to that particular Member of Parliament, who works tirelessly—often better than some members of the Labour party—to hold the Government to account. There is no question that she is fighting. If the Labour party had any involvement in that, I can only apologise whole-heartedly. It is totally unacceptable.

Stopping the cross-party love-in, I am disappointed that the Government did not listen to a single one of the recommendations of the Select Committee. If it had been me writing those recommendations, they would have been considerably more radical. I would have asked for the moon on a stick. The Committee's recommendations were thoughtful, and it was not asking too much to recommend some of the outreach, as has already been pointed out. Some of the tiny changes to the Equality Act 2010, which would mean we could have all-women shortlists for mayoral and police and crime commissioner candidates, are the sweep of a single pen. They would not affect a single person in the Government even slightly, because their party does not recognise all-women shortlists anyway. They do not have to do it. We just want to, and we need the law to reflect that. If the Conservative party, the ruling party, does not think that quotas work, then it can crack on with that point of view. We in the Labour party know that they work. To answer the question asked by the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), the progress was made as a result of the Labour party and all-women shortlists. They are the single biggest reason for progress.

**Mrs Miller:** I pay tribute to the work the hon. Lady does for the Committee, and she knows that I support the recommendations of the report. Is she not a bit disappointed that she feels her party needs all-women shortlists for mayoral elections in order to get female representation?

**Jess Phillips:** I feel utterly disappointed, but the triumph of hope over experience tells me that I have to force my party to look at electing women into the position of metro Mayors. The Conservatives want it too, but they are not willing to do it, whereas I am willing to say, "Yes, we have a problem. I have a solution. It will work."

To speak to the point made by my hon. Friend, and I will say friend, the Member for Walsall North—is it north? It is all just the Black country to me—the idea that I would not want a surgeon selected via a quota to operate on me is not something I recognise. I would be delighted to have somebody who had been selected from an all-women shortlist be the surgeon in my hospital and operate on me. I would be less happy to have somebody who had probably got the position because he went to a certain school or was born into a certain family. He would be no better; he would just have been given all the tools to allow him to become a surgeon or even to dream of becoming a surgeon. My hon. Friend will know, just as I do, that kids from Birmingham who have kissed the Blarney stone rarely end up being surgeons in Birmingham's hospitals. I would be more than happy to be operated on.

To draw out the surgeon analogy, when somebody operates on me I expect evidence to have been taken about how they do that procedure. I want to know how they have come to the conclusion that that procedure is the very best thing for my health. I want to know that it is going to work, and I look for evidence. I want to see more women in Parliament, so I will look at the evidence of what works and I will ask that it is implemented. What works is quotas for women and sanctions when they are not realised. There is no other area of Government

where we would just say, "Oh, do you know what really works to stop people being hit by buses? Oh, well, I'm just not sure it's the one we want to go for," or, "Do you know what really, really works for making sure that more kids go to school? But I just don't know whether it's good enough for choice if we do that." We would not do that with any other thing, so why do we do it about this?

We look at clear evidence about the heavy lifting and the reason we have more women in Parliament now. In the last election, the Conservative party went backward. The Labour party surged forward. Do not get me wrong: the Labour party is in no way faultless in this area—I have just had to apologise for someone having a coffin left outside their house—but it is willing to do the thing that actually works, and to do it at every single level of the political party. It has to be balanced for every single person who sits on the National Executive Committee and for every person who goes to the conference. That is not because of people who want to claim they are great heroes of the movement. It is because of women in the Labour party fighting and bearing the scars.

**Bill Grant:** I note the comments about the negativity of the Conservative party. Here is a reciprocal quiz question: I wonder if the hon. Lady can explain why the party that seems to be quite restrictive on women is the party that has produced two wonderful female Prime Ministers, and yet no other party is following it?

**Jess Phillips:** I will query "wonderful", in both regards. They are women. As somebody who grew up in the 1980s, I have to say that Mrs Thatcher does not deserve "wonderful", but she does deserve credit for what she achieved. There are no two ways about it. The jury is out on the current one, because she is the head of the Government who have turned down the exact things that we are asking for.

Of course, there is a problem, and here I will show hon. Members something that I know works: admitting that we have a problem. The Labour party has a problem with having women in leadership positions. That is just a fact, and it is one I can see based on the evidence. There are all sorts of reasons for why that is, and it is partially because women in the Labour party—I feel awful saying this; present company excepted—do not defend the status quo; we are radicals who act for change. The reason our party has fallen short is because we are radicals.

It is very difficult to get people to vote for radicals or for things that would affect the actual status quo, so while it is amazing that the Prime Minister and the late Baroness Thatcher achieved what they have, to me they also very much represent the status quo. They did not challenge an established order. That is one of the reasons I think the Labour party struggles: our women would definitely upset the apple-cart, as they always have in our movement.

**Hannah Bardell:** The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. Does she agree that the fact that somebody in power is a woman does not mean that they should be held to different standards from men? That seems to be part of the issue: as women in the positions we hold, we have a right to be good or bad in the same way that men have.

**Jess Phillips:** Absolutely. All politicians need to be cut a bit of slack, because we are only human and we will all make mistakes. However, if a woman makes a mistake, she is making a mistake forever. That mistake could be what she wore on her feet. Everybody knows what shoes the Prime Minister likes, but what shoes did David Cameron like? Probably boring posh ones, but nobody will ever comment on that. We are held to an entirely different standard.

For me, some of the recommendations in the report are really obvious and easy solutions. I understand that there may need to be a bit of give and take; we did not expect all the recommendations to be accepted, but for some to have been considered would have been nice. I will not speak for much longer because I recognise that we are running out of time, but in the Government's response, the idea that political parties can solve this problem is either naive or is basically trying to kick the can down the road. Political parties are not good and equal institutions that rely only on fair play. They are places where power, patronage and position mean everything. Nothing more than the past few months has shown me that my political party, as well as every political party in this building, cares more about politics, power and position than it cared about, for example, my friend Bex.

To think that political parties have the will to do this themselves is basically to say that the problem has to go away on its own. They absolutely do not. They care more about by-election results than they will ever care about the problem of sexual harassment, for example. That was felt by everybody on the Committee when every single political party presented to it. Nobody will actually turn on their own in the end. That is why people think we are all the same and why they have no trust in us. I have to say, for the first time, as somebody who believes in this building so deeply, I am kind of with the people on the doorstep who say we are all the same. That is how it has felt for people like me since the sexual harassment scandal started in Westminster.

**Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair):** We are aiming to finish by 3 pm. I am quite flexible, Maria, if you are a little flexible on your side as well.

2.44 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the chair, Mr Sharma. I am not quite sure that that time limit will work for what I have here, but I will do the best that I can. I thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for her speech and for her Committee's work on its excellent report, and I thank all those who gave evidence to that Committee.

I share the disappointment of everybody who has spoken about the Government not taking on the recommendations. I hope that, now that we have a new Government, they may wish to revisit this and take another look at the recommendations, because they are good recommendations. I add to those who have talked about quotas, and I share their concerns: I suppose that quotas are not perfect or what we would want in an ideal world. However, we do not have an ideal world. Women are not equal to men in society—or in this building—so there has to be a disruptor to the selection process that starts to make the rules work a little bit

more in women's favour. If we leave it how it is, it will be a very long time before we actually see any change. Action on this is long overdue.

The right hon. Member for Basingstoke was right to talk about cultural factors and this building, the way it works and some of the behaviour that happens here. This is not new. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) referred to Winnie Ewing, who I will also refer to. Hers was one of the first political biographies that I read, and she reported that, in her time in this place, as the single female Scottish National party representative, she was

“interrupted whenever I spoke, I was regularly insulted and I was even defamed once or twice...I was even stalked by a Labour MP”.

She describes that stalking in some detail, although she does not name her stalker. That behaviour continued when she became a representative in the European Parliament as well. It took the chair of the European Parliament to write to the Speaker here to tell off those Members who continued to harass and upset her when she was in the European Parliament, which is completely unacceptable.

We know that that behaviour has not changed in recent years. My former colleague, Dr Eilidh Whiteford, was threatened with “a doing” in 2011 by a then Select Committee Chair, which is absolutely inappropriate. She felt that she had to withdraw from that Committee as a result of that. As we have seen from recent news of harassments, that is still a problem. It is still an issue, and we cannot be blind to it—we need to act.

Other Members have talked about their own experiences. My experience is that I have been well supported by men and women both in the SNP and not in the SNP. Like the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), I started as a local councillor, on Glasgow City Council. When I was first elected in 2007, the council was very male, pale and stale, and there was some very inappropriate behaviour by some of the older male councillors.

I had only been there for, I think, a matter of weeks before one of the male councillors thought it was appropriate to come up to my colleague and pat her on the stomach because he thought she was pregnant. She was not, but he should not have been doing that anyway; there is no need for that kind of behaviour. Some years later, when I was pregnant, a Labour councillor thought it would be appropriate, during meetings with other people present, to offer to deliver my baby. I made it perfectly clear how I felt about that kind of comment, but he persisted in making them because he knew I did not like it. There needs to be more challenging of those types of behaviours, because they are not funny; it is not a joke and it makes women feel uncomfortable.

I am glad to see that there has been progress in women's representation in this place. In my own seat of Glasgow Central, none of the nine candidates were women in 2010, but three out of nine were women in 2015, and in 2017 it was the only seat in the country with an all-female candidate list. Progress has been made, but it is not enough. We need to think about how we support women when they get to this place. We need to look at maternity leave and support during pregnancy and we need to look at family-friendly hours. We also need to look at even more radical things. I have suggested before that we should have a version of the French

suppléant system, in which Members could have somebody to job-share with or fill in for them when they are not here.

We also need to look at the impact of the boundary review and whether we can do more about safe seats and incumbency. To help to address those issues, the SNP has taken the approach that if a male MSP stands down, there will be an all-women shortlist in that seat to fill that gap. The former Member for Ochil and South Perthshire, Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, is our national women and equalities officer. She has done a huge amount of work to encourage women to stand; she runs a women's academy and is working to get women's confidence up. That confidence is so important. Men will often put themselves forward for things after looking at the job description and thinking, "Of course I can do that," when they can only do half of the things in the description. Women will look at the job description and think, "I couldn't possibly do that."

We need to encourage women to stand. We need to identify good women who have potential and ideas and things that they want to do to change the world. We need to get them to stand up and participate. We have seen a lot more female candidates coming forward in the SNP for council, which is a very important starting ground for people who want to get into politics and a very important part of politics. We need to support women in that. We cannot just encourage them and then take away any sense of structure. We need to keep that going over time and make sure that they continue to be supported.

We have some exceptional women in the SNP who I am very proud of. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston mentioned her mum, Lis Bardell, who is one of the most wonderful and exceptional encouragers in the party, and fearsome with it. We have a responsibility and a duty to make change and to make sure that, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn said, women get here and then get into positions of power where they can help to make change. Select Committee Chairs have huge power to influence, change and set the agenda. Without women in those positions, nothing will change in so many different areas, particularly those where policy hugely affects women. I thank Members for their contributions to the debate.

2.50 pm

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma, and to contribute to the debate.

As I have previously stated, 51% of the population are women, and the other 49% would not be here if it was not for the women, so arguing for 50:50 representation in Parliament is really quite reasonable. I am quite disappointed that the Government have not accepted any of the recommendations in the Women and Equalities Committee report. That is the problem with politics—people see that we say one thing and do something else, and it puts people off politics or politicians. If we truly believe in equality of representation, we must accept at least one of the recommendations, and that will make the Committee feel that it is doing a great job.

The report states:

"We are concerned that Parliament is failing to be a world leader on women's representation."

That is really important to consider as we debate Brexit and our standing in the world. It is important that we

do not fall back. That alone should get people to sit up and listen to the debate we are having on representation in Parliament.

The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) is an excellent Chair, and her Committee's report makes reference to the "inflexibility" of Parliament's working practices. How we vote in this place has been mentioned a number of times. I accept that there is value in us mingling in the Lobby when we vote, but once could be enough, and we could then vote electronically for the remaining 10 votes. There are ways we can improve the current system without losing some of its benefits.

We must also look at gerrymandering and the boundary changes. We will see a substantial loss of women representatives if the Boundary Commission's recommendations go ahead. The Fawcett Society found that 37% of those at risk are women. If that goes ahead, the loss to this place will be substantial.

**Mrs Miller:** I do not want to add a discordant note, but if there were an issue of gerrymandering, surely it is the fact that at the moment constituencies such as mine have 85,000 people in them, while constituencies in other parts of the country have only 50,000. Surely that is the gerrymandering that we are trying to get rid of with the boundary changes, which I fear will not go through because of a lack of cross-party support.

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

**Dawn Butler:** The whole system is substantially flawed in how it counts the number of constituents, because it takes into consideration only people who are registered to vote, and not everybody who actually lives in the constituency. The right hon. Lady will find that constituencies such as mine—a London constituency—have a substantial number of constituents who are not registered. The whole system is flawed in terms of how the number is calculated, but it is not only that. The Labour party is set to lose more seats under the boundary changes than any other party, and we would therefore lose more women. That is where some of the gerrymandering comes into effect.

The report states:

"Our focus on women in this report should not be taken as a lack of interest in diversity more generally".

I accept that. When we look at achieving gender equality, we need to look at all kinds of women. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) referred to intersectionality in women of colour, who often get ignored or brushed out of the feminist argument. Even though we are looking at women, we need to look at the diversity of women. This is not confined to women of colour; it is also working-class women, disabled women, LGBT+ women, single women, single mums and so on. It is important that when we talk about women, we are not focusing on one particular group of women who are then the acceptable face of women generally.

On the theme of thanking women, I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), who replaced an awful misogynistic male. She was fundamental in my journey to get here.

The hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), who is no longer in his place, made quite a powerful speech, some of which I agreed with. I am sorry that he

[Dawn Butler]

is a little bit scared of me, but I am also quite pleased. I hope that his time on the Committee has brought him on a journey to understand that it is not that women are not capable of doing certain jobs or being in certain positions. It is often that barriers are put in women's way that are not put in men's way. It could be the old boys' club, the secret handshake or what you drink down the pub. Certain barriers are put in women's way, and that stops them more than their ability to do a job, which is often not the case. I said this at the Committee, but I will repeat it for those who were not there: I will know when we have reached real equality, especially in this place, when we have as many rubbish women as rubbish men. Then I will know that equality has really hit its peak.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about conditioning people, and especially males, from a young age. That is all well and good, but the process of conditioning takes time—decades—and therefore we sometimes have to force that thought process. The way to force it is to have quotas or all-women shortlists or to make the decision makers more accountable. That is how we force conditioning or undo the conditioning that has happened.

More than 57% of women who have ever sat in the House of Commons have been Labour Members. All-women shortlists played a fundamental role in making sure we took that step forwards. To ignore the importance of all-women shortlists or the difference they make is to ignore the progress we often talk about in Parliament. It should not be ignored.

There has been a lot of talk about women in power. It is not just about women being in power; it is about women in power empowering other women. That is vital. We talk about the ladder of success. I like to think that when women are on that ladder, we lay the foundations for an escalator. If we are on that escalator of success, we lay the foundations for a lift, so that we make the journey of the woman coming behind us faster, smoother and easier, and we celebrate that fact. The fact that 86% of the cuts that our Prime Minister has presided over have affected women is a real disappointment for a woman in power.

Labour is seeking gender equality by 2020 or whenever the next general election is. It might be next year—who knows? The last general election was called quite quickly, so we did not have time to enforce all-women shortlists, but even then, the Labour party still achieved 45% of its Members being women. Of the 262 MPs, 119 are female. Labour has more female MPs than all the other political parties added together. That is something to celebrate and talk about. We cannot have this debate without acknowledging how far the Labour party has come.

In regard to black, Asian and minority ethnic representation, 32 out of the 52 are Labour MPs. Again, the fact that that journey has come about is fundamental to who we are as a party in regard to equality, but there is also a thought process and the measures that we have put in place.

**Mrs Miller:** The hon. Lady says that this is fundamental to what her party is about. It has had all-women shortlists for 20 years, yet her hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) advocates—as my report advocates—that we should perhaps look at extending all-women shortlists, because, as her hon. Friend tells

me, the Labour party is still finding it difficult to get women elected to mayoralities and as police and crime commissioners. Why has that not caused a culture change in the hon. Lady's party if she says that it is part of its culture in the first place?

**Dawn Butler:** It is a fact that we have two police and crime commissioners who are women in the Labour party. We could do better in regard to elected Mayors, but the need to do better does not negate the fact that we are doing better than the Conservative party, the Lib Dems or any other party. I concede that we need to do better, can do better and must do better, but that does not in any way negate what we have done or mean that we should not celebrate the fact that the Labour party has done so well. As much as that might grate, it is a fact.

The game changer was all-women shortlists. What I often hear, especially from the Conservative party, is, "We want the best person for the job," or, "We want the best man for the job." Sometimes the best man for the job is a woman. The best person could be a woman. I find quite irritating the assumption that a woman getting the job is not the best person for the role.

On the whole, I commend the report. It insists that the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority conduct an equality impact assessment, which I think is fundamentally important. I hope the Minister will talk about equality impact assessments and how important they are for analysing what happens and who is affected. I hope that the Government will take equality impact assessments on board in all their policies because, at the end of the day, all the women who are in this place stand on the shoulders of other women who fought really hard, who died and who shed blood, sweat and tears—literally. It is important that we ensure that whatever we produce from this House emboldens and empowers society as a whole, but in particular women.

3.3 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office (Caroline Nokes):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson, and, indeed, to be back in this Chamber after a gap of a considerable number of months. I apologise if I am somewhat rusty. I have often said—and I believe that the Chairman of the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), shares the view—that sometimes Parliament is at its best in Westminster Hall, when we are speaking in a consensual and cross-party manner. I think that I recently followed my right hon. Friend, in successive weeks, on "The Politics Show South". I heard her say one week that she felt that Parliament was at its best when it worked on a cross-party basis in Westminster Hall, and I repeated that the following week. I am sure that the viewers of the BBC's "Politics South" programme found us slightly tedious, but never mind. We have seen elements of that consensus today. Right hon. and hon. Members, including those who may have spoken and then had to leave, raised a number of really important points, many of which I will struggle to disagree with.

Of course, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the debate, and all the members of the Select Committee on an excellent report. Unsurprisingly, I have had the opportunity to read and reflect on it and, indeed, the Government response this week.

The issue of diverse representation in Parliament was last discussed in this Chamber just three months ago, in a debate led by my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). I am sorry that she was unable to be here today, because I also had the opportunity to read the record of that debate and the many important and pertinent comments that both female and male Members of the House made about their struggles to get here and, indeed, some of the challenges that we all face when we are here.

I echo the comment that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke made about how well Hampshire has done in securing female representation. I believe that we lead the way on diversity, in terms of both gender and BAME representation. We are doing brilliantly on that, but I cannot necessarily point to the reasons why. Back in September, the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) made a similar comment about why she could not necessarily share all the secrets of why Livingston and West Lothian had done better than other parts of the country in securing both female representation and female candidates. I was struck by the comment about the constituency that was, I think, the only one in the country with an all-female line-up at the last election.

I was talking about Hampshire. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinéage) and I arrived here in 2010, I was struck by the tales from my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke about how miserable this place had been when there were only 17 female Conservative Members. That increased to nearly 50 in 2010, and today it is nearly 70. We now have my hon. Friends the Members for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) and for Eastleigh. Between 2015 and 2017, we also had my former hon. Friend Flick Drummond, then Member for Portsmouth South, whom we all very much miss and would like to see back here.

As my ministerial colleagues have made clear in their response to the report and, indeed, in various debates in the House, we want more progress, and that means a gender-balanced and therefore representative House of Commons. I was struck by the comments, which none of us would disagree with, that this would be a better place if we had better gender representation. There is certainly real aspiration—we have heard some today—on both sides of the House to find talent in the broadest cross-section of society. That should also be the case in our local councils, where women are represented similarly to how they are here: they hold only one third of elected positions and comprise only 17% of council leaders.

Local government is often seen as, and indeed is, a pipeline for talented people who might aspire to come to this place. Looking around the Chamber, I can see people who have been representatives on local authorities, as I was, and who, either by accident or design, found themselves on a trajectory that brought them to Westminster, but I argue that there are woefully low numbers of female council leaders and councillors. If we are to look at local government as our pipeline, we simply cannot take it for granted.

Earlier this week, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke hosted an event entitled “Ask Her to Stand”. That is such a crucial part of this. Whether we are male or female Members of the House and whether

we are members of large parties or small ones, we all have a responsibility to find women who are interested and active, to encourage them to develop and to foster their talent, so that they have the confidence to come and occupy the same positions as we do. It is a real privilege to be here, and we have to find constructive and positive solutions to some of the more challenging aspects of the job.

I often spend time encouraging women I meet to think about standing, but I was really struck by the comments of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) when she was asking what she should say to young girls in her constituency: should she look them in the eye and tell them that this is the greatest place to work, or should she be honest? It is a really difficult question. I had some young girls from St James’ Primary School in Bermondsey come in here a few weeks ago as part of the “I Can Be” project, and they asked me whether this was a great place to work and whether I loved every minute of my job. I was honest, but I said that the same is true of any job: you will love bits of it and hate bits of it. That is very true in Parliament, but there are some environmental factors. Many Members have referred to both the environment and the culture. I told those six-year-old girls that we have to modernise, and if modernisation can bring with it the removal of the mice, I for one will be a very happy Member of Parliament.

Virtually every Member has spoken about the cultural issues in this place, and I can argue with none of the comments made, especially on voting at midnight. I was going to describe an impromptu surgery, but it was not a surgery. I sat in the Lady Members’ Room between 10 and midnight on Monday and the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn was there for part of the time. I confess I was asleep for some of the time. I talked to some senior Members from her party about what we could do to make this place more attractive. I will give credit to the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who was particularly honest in some of her views. She was right: it is a nonsense that we are here voting at midnight on occasion. Although the issues are serious and important, can any of us attest to being at our best at midnight? I certainly am not, and the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn can attest to the fact that about two minutes before the vote I was fast asleep, and probably snoring.

We have a long way to go and I am conscious that I have many words that I want to say but will probably not get through all of them.

**Hannah Bardell:** I thank the Minister for giving way, and for her comments. One of the cultural issues that we touched on in our report was the representation of women and female parliamentarians in the media—the abuse and attention that we often receive. Speaking for myself, I have not received a huge amount of that, but some of my colleagues have. When we look up at the members of the Lobby during Prime Minister’s Question Time, which is about the only time the Press Gallery is ever full, we see how scarce women are among them. Some of the challenge is in the Lobby and in those who report on our parliamentary work. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must do more to ensure that there are more women—and greater diversity—in the media?

**Caroline Nokes:** Do you know, I really thank the hon. Lady for those comments. The hon. Member for West Ham told me that I would be a coward if I did not stand up in Westminster Hall today and say that part of the problem was the media. The hon. Member for Livingston makes an absolutely valid point about the pale, male and stale nature of those that we see in the Lobby during PMQs. Other hon. Members have mentioned shoes. I cannot appear on the media without being told that I need to lose weight and wear longer skirts. Whose business is that other than mine?

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn made a highly relevant point about Select Committee Chairs. We have a brilliant female Select Committee Chair sitting with us today. However, across the other Select Committees there are too few women Chairs. I remember receiving one of those round-robin emails that we all receive when it is Select Committee election time, from the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) when she was standing to be Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee. I cannot pretend that she is one of my friends—I barely know her. She sent me an email asking me to support her in that election and I simply replied, “There is one thing that is absolutely certain in an election. If there is not a woman on the ballot paper, a woman will not get elected. By the way, that means I will of course vote for you.” That is an important point. Even when women get to this place, they appear to be somewhat reluctant, for whatever reason, to put themselves forward.

Two of my hon. Friends have left the Chamber. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) told us a fantastic tale about his all-male upbringing and his background in the construction industry. Even in the construction industry, one can sporadically meet really inspirational women. I attended a reception a couple of months ago, which gives me a brilliant opportunity to mention two female directors of the company Saint-Gobain, who talked to me about the challenges that they face in the construction industry. They looked around this place and said, “It’s not as bad as here, though.” They made a really valid argument.

The hon. Member for Livingston gave us a fantastic insight into Livingston’s proud tradition. She made a valuable point about the banking crash and the evidence that, had there been more women, there would have been different experiences and different challenges, and we all know that that leads to different decision-making processes. I was delighted to hear her reference to “New Dawn”. I was the Chair of the Speaker’s Advisory Committee on Works of Art when we unveiled “New Dawn”. I wish I could say I had been the Chair when it was commissioned, but I cannot claim that. It was brilliant to have a modern 21st-century piece of art in the Palace itself. Too often the modern art is shunted over into Portcullis House, but we and the artist Mary Branson found a great space where we could celebrate and commemorate the journey that so many women have been on to bring us here today.

The hon. Lady mentioned ladders, and the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) mentioned ladders, escalators and lifts. She is right. Too often there have been examples that we can all point to of women who have pulled up ladders behind them, which is not the way we should go. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has taken a bit of stick today, but I want to

share with Members just one tale of a woman who was prepared to get up a ladder in 2010 to launch my general election campaign in the Romsey and Southampton North constituency. I did not think she would go up the ladder to unveil the poster that we had stuck 10 feet up a wall, but she did. She has been an inspiration to many of us and has been prepared to knuckle down and do some pretty heavy lifting when it has been called for.

I am going to destroy the career of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) by telling the House how much I love her and her outspokenness and the fact that she has been determined to keep banging the drum through some difficult and trying times. She was right to mention that we have to be prepared to admit when there is a problem. Former Prime Minister David Cameron was quite candid. When he was leader of the Conservative party before he became Prime Minister in 2009, he confessed that the under-representation of women and ethnic minorities was,

“a real problem for Parliament and it’s been an even greater problem for my party”.

I know that is 100% accurate because I lifted that out of the report and scribbled it down diligently. We have to be more open and candid. I do not pretend that I have all the solutions—I certainly do not—but the message that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women wanted me to convey is that she is listening to opinions and wants to do more.

I appreciate the disappointment that Members have expressed today about the response to the report. I do not pretend that I am on the easiest pitch trying to defend that—I am clearly not. As I said at the beginning, we approach this in a determined, cross-party and consensual way. The Government Equalities Office has taken a robust approach with business, encouraging organisations to think differently about what they can offer employees, developing strategies to retain and encourage women. The same must apply to the political parties who have to tackle the issue of workplace gender diversity with the same vigour that we are asking of the civil service. As the Minister with responsibility for the civil service in the Cabinet Office, I am conscious that we have some great strategies on returnships and retaining women in the workforce, but that is very much about a variety of solutions in a variety of different places.

I am not sure how much more tolerance people will have for me rambling on. There was a determination that we would speak for only an hour and a half, which I have clearly bust through badly. We have to focus on what the individual parties can do to address the problems. I think that focus is absolutely right. Today has been quite positive and constructive. Just as individual businesses require innovative and niche solutions to their own workforces, so do political parties, and they are best placed to know how to leverage the change within them. Different parties take different approaches to encouraging women’s participation and selecting candidates because they are largely starting from different points.

I was struck by the intervention of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley on my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), who has now gone. I knew the answer to the question was women-only shortlists. I knew that they had a massive impact in 1997 and I know it was the Labour party that achieved that. I am clear on that. I am also clear that in most political parties individual constituency associations

are autonomous bodies that are absolutely determined to retain control over the selection of candidates, in the same way as I know that Romsey in 2002 was absolutely determined to pick somebody of its own choosing. The same is true for Basingstoke, for Brent Central and for Birmingham, Yardley. We have to allow the parties to have structures that allow those associations to have autonomy. A one-size-fits-all solution will not give us the answer.

I want us to remain open and collaborative, and to talk about successes and what has and has not worked. There is clearly much that we can learn from each other. That is why the Government Equalities Office is commissioning an evidence review, which will encompass the range of approaches taken here and internationally to increase women's representation. The aim is to provide political parties with a range of possible solutions on which they can draw. That will be supplemented by some qualitative research with women and men in Parliament, to demonstrate the range of experiences, career paths and skills that Members bring to their role. I want it to be clear to prospective candidates that it is just such diversity of experience that makes this place truly democratic.

Turning to the future, next year there will be a great opportunity, when we celebrate the centenary of women's inclusion in the electorate and in Parliament, to set a marker in the sand from which we cannot roll back. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Women will be convening expert academics and colleagues throughout 2018 to establish our aspirations as shared action. I know that she has already approached a number of colleagues here, and will continue to work with them and with peers in the other place. In the light of the new challenges that we face, such as online abuse, which has been mentioned this afternoon, and the constantly evolving role of parliamentarians, we must look towards next year as an opportunity both for an exciting celebration and for addressing some of the difficult aspects of 21st-century politics.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions. I believe we are all working towards the same aim, and I hope

that they will continue to use the privilege of their position here, as I shall, to sustain momentum. Those of us with a deep commitment to diversity will champion the issues in our parties. We must do so with vigour and determination. Each of us is a role model for young people who are thinking about what they want to be when they grow up. That is a privileged and special position to be in. I suspect that the majority of our constituents do not know what brought us to this place, or where we worked before. Perhaps we have a responsibility to explain that journey to them, to tell them about the privilege of being part of what I would argue is the world's greatest democracy, and to encourage more of them to come forward and stand.

3.22 pm

**Mrs Miller:** It is wonderful to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Mr Robertson. I thank everyone who has taken the opportunity to come and contribute to the debate, and particularly the Minister for giving such a positive response. It is heartening to hear that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women is undertaking an evidence review. We will all welcome that, and we will welcome her involvement, and that of the Minister, in finding a way forward. It is not a choice; it is a necessity. We need better gender representation and diversity in Parliament. It is the responsibility of us all, and such debates help to move the issue forward. I assure all the Members present for the debate that the Women and Equalities Committee will continue to look at the issue in detail.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Fifth Report of the Women and Equalities Committee, Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 election, Session 2016-17, HC 630, and the Government Response, Cm 9492.

3.23 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Thursday 7 December 2017

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Energy Infrastructure

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** I would like to make the following statement:

#### *Nuclear power generation*

New nuclear power stations have an important role to play. As confirmed in the Industrial Strategy, nuclear is a vital part of our energy mix, providing low carbon power now and into the future. The Government's framework to bring forward new nuclear power stations was established in the 2008 White Paper on Nuclear Power, as was the principle the Government should take active steps to help facilitate the construction of new nuclear.

The overarching National Policy Statement ("NPS") for Energy ("EN-1") published in July 2011 made clear that nuclear power is a low-carbon, proven technology which can play an important role increasing the resilience and diversity of the UK's energy system. The assessment of the need for new electricity generation carried out to support EN-1 remains valuable and continues to be relevant.

My Department's annual updated energy and emissions projections state that by 2035 overall demand for electricity is expected to have increased. Therefore, with a number of the existing coal and nuclear fleet due to close by 2030, new nuclear power generation remains key to meeting our 2050 obligations. This is in line with the 2017 Clean Growth Strategy. The Government have noted previously that there are technical and commercial barriers to deploying other technologies to produce the same annual generation as that of nuclear power. The need for the UK to continue to transition to a low-carbon electricity market is underlined by the 2015 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ("UNFCCC") Paris Agreement. The Government believe that it is important that there is a strong pipeline of new nuclear power to contribute to the UK's future energy system.

#### *Government consultation*

The Government have today published a consultation on the process and criteria for designating potentially suitable sites in a National Policy Statement for nuclear power between 2026 and 2035. This begins the process towards designating a new National Policy Statement ("the new NPS") applicable to nuclear plants expected to be deployed after 2025 and capable of deployment by the end of 2035 and with over 1GW of single-reactor electricity generating capacity.

#### *Nuclear National Policy Statements*

##### *Applicability of EN-6*

The Government consider that the current nuclear NPS, EN-6, only "has effect" for the purposes of section 104 of the Planning Act 2008 ("the Act") for development

which forms parts of a project able to demonstrate expected deployment by the end of 2025. Applications for a Development Consent Order under the Act will be considered in the first instance by an examining authority appointed by the Secretary of State to consider any specific project proposals. For the purpose of the applicability of EN-6, Government considers "deployment" to mean the point when a generating station first begins to feed the electricity it generates into the national grid, noting this will likely be at a point before full commercial operation.

For projects yet to apply for development consent and due to deploy beyond 2025, the Government continues to give its strong in principle support to project proposals at those sites currently listed in EN-6. Even if EN-6 is considered not to have effect under section 104 of the Act for such a project, section 105 of the Act would apply to the decision on whether or not to grant development consent for the project.

The Government are confident that both EN-1 and EN-6 incorporate information, assessments and statements which will continue to be important and relevant for projects which will deploy after 2025, including statements concerning the need for nuclear power—as well as environmental and other assessments that continue to be relevant for those projects. As such, in deciding whether or not to grant development consent to such a project, the Secretary of State would be required, under section 105(2)(c) of the Act, to have regard to the content of EN-1 and EN-6, unless they have been suspended or revoked. In respect of matters where there is no relevant change of circumstances it is likely that significant weight would be given to the policy in EN-1 and EN-6.

#### *Applicability of the new NPS*

The new NPS, once designated, will "have effect" for the purposes of section 104 of the Act for development which forms parts of a project able to demonstrate expected deployment after 2025 and before the end of 2035.

The Government also consider that a published new NPS in draft form would be considered as relevant to a decision on whether or not to grant development consent under section 105 of the Act.

[HCWS321]

### Energy Policy

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** Today we have announced our next steps for the development of advanced nuclear technologies in the UK. The advanced nuclear sector has the potential to play an important part in the UK's industrial strategy building on our existing economic strengths and competitive advantages in nuclear while shaping new advanced nuclear markets and contributing to tackling the clean growth grand challenge. To help deliver this, the Government will provide up to £56 million for advanced nuclear technologies over the next three years.

The Government launched the first phase of the small modular reactor (SMR) competition in March 2016 as an evidence-gathering phase with the goal of

gauging market interest among technology developers, utilities, and potential investors. That exercise is now closed.

My Department received expressions of interest from 33 eligible participants. Officials have worked with these participants to understand the technological and commercial viability of new reactors in development. As an information gathering process, phase one did not involve down-selection. All eligible participants were given the opportunity to engage with the Government to inform policy development.

This exercise provided valuable insight into the advanced nuclear technologies market. We are grateful for the participation of all entrants.

#### *What we have learnt*

Phase one demonstrated that SMRs could potentially play an important part in a broader nuclear market. There is a large variety of potential technologies. These comprise technologies which range in scale between micro, small and medium-scale reactors and which span technology types from conventional water-cooled reactors to 4th generation reactors using novel fuels and coolants, as well as fusion reactor concepts. Given this breadth, the Government believe that “SMR”, as commonly understood, is too narrow a description for technologies coming forward after the current generation of nuclear power stations. Instead the Government consider this to be the “Advanced Nuclear” market.

Engagement with competition participants helped shape our thinking for the next steps for advanced nuclear policy. Three key requests came through. The first was that technology developers need better and earlier access to regulators in order to address regulatory requirements by design and to provide confidence to potential investors. The second was support to turn new developers’ ideas into detailed designs, bridging the investment gap between innovation and commercialisation. The third request was to create the right market conditions to enable developers to bring new reactors to market as commercially viable businesses.

#### *Advanced nuclear technologies—next steps*

The competition demonstrated that there is the potential for the UK to become a world-leader in developing the next generations of nuclear technologies. The UK’s nuclear sector is well placed to compete globally in this emerging market. The policies announced today are intended as the first steps to achieve that potential.

We are providing up to £7 million of funding to regulators to build the capability and capacity needed to assess and license small and novel reactor designs, as announced in the clean growth strategy: This funding will also provide support for pre-licensing engagement between vendors and regulators.

Over the next three years we will also provide funding to support advanced reactors through a two-stage advanced modular reactor programme. Up to £4 million in Stage 1 will support around 8 reactor vendors to carry out detailed technical and commercial feasibility studies. Subject to Stage 1 demonstrating clear value for money through a formal re-approval process with the Treasury, up to £40 million of further funding could then support 3 to 4 vendors to accelerate the development of their designs. Up to a further £5 million may also be made available to regulators to support this.

The Government will also continue to work closely with the advanced nuclear industry stakeholders to foster the market conditions needed to enable developers to bring privately financed small and novel reactors to market. A crucial element of this is demonstrating commercial viability—in particular, the ability of new designs and delivery mechanisms to attract investment and generate cost-competitive electricity.

Therefore the Government are setting up an expert finance group to advise how small and advanced reactor projects could raise investment in the UK. By bringing together nuclear and financial sector expertise we anticipate that this group will help demonstrate the commercial proposition of small reactors in the emerging nuclear market. The group will be asked to report in the spring.

Subject to further evidence on the commercial viability of advanced nuclear technologies, we will continue to look closely at other market failures which inhibit new reactors competing in our diverse energy markets.

[HCWS322]

## DEFENCE

### Correction

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** I wish to inform the House that an error has been identified in the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) in Defence oral questions on 27 November 2017, *Official Report*, column 21, on the subject of funding defence nuclear capabilities.

To clarify, the UK’s nuclear deterrent has always been funded from the Defence budget.

[HCWS328]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Agriculture and Fisheries Pre-Council Statement

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** The Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on December 11-12 in Brussels.

As the provisional agenda stands, the primary focus for fisheries will be reaching a political agreement on Atlantic and North Sea total allowable catches and quotas for 2018.

The primary focus for agriculture will be a presentation from the European Commission on “The Future of Food and Farming”.

There are currently five items scheduled under “any other business”:

stakeholder conference on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and its future: “Beyond 2020: Supporting Europe’s coastal states communities”

implementation of the landing obligation, choke species risk in January 2019

outcome of the conference on “Modern Biotechnologies in Agriculture: Paving the way for responsible innovation”

outcome of the high-level conference on African swine fever (ASF) (Prague, 8-9 November 2017)

tackling unfair trading practices with an aim to achieve a more balanced food supply chain and strengthen the farmer’s position.

On 23 June 2016, the EU referendum took place and the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. During this period the Government will continue to negotiate, implement and apply EU legislation. The outcome of these negotiations will determine what arrangements apply in relation to EU legislation in future once the UK has left the EU.

[HCWS320]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Foreign Affairs Council (Foreign and Defence Ministers)

**The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):** I will attend the Foreign Affairs Council (Foreign and Development Ministers) on 11 December. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative (HRVP) of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting will be held in Brussels.

#### *Foreign Affairs Council*

The agenda for the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) is expected to include Iraq, the middle east; as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo under any other business. There will be a lunch focused on the G5 Sahel joint force and a joint FAC and FAC (development) session on the recent European Union-African Union (AU-EU) summit. There will be a short FAC (development) in the afternoon.

The HRVP is expected to open the meeting with introductory remarks on the Eastern Partnership summit, permanent structured co-operation (PESCO), Libya, Zimbabwe and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

#### *Iraq*

Ministers will discuss the situation in Iraq, including winning the peace post-Daesh and managing recent tensions between Baghdad and the Kurdish region. The EEAS will provide an update on the EU Iraq strategy that is due to be released in January. We will underline the need to continue de-escalating tensions between Baghdad and Erbil, ensuring that all parties focus on the fight against Daesh, preventing its re-emergence and working together to build a more stable, prosperous and inclusive future for all of Iraq's people, including Iraqi Kurds.

#### *Middle east*

Ministers will discuss developments in the middle east. We continue to be concerned by the humanitarian situation in Yemen and continued restrictions on commercial and humanitarian supplies entering Yemen while understanding Saudi Arabia's legitimate security concerns. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have both engaged on this pressing matter. We are also concerned by the recent developments in Yemen which underline the need for a comprehensive political solution. We will encourage European partners to work with us to find solutions.

#### *G5 Sahel joint force*

Ministers will meet representatives of countries which have stood up the G5 Sahel joint force—Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad.

#### *EU-Africa*

Ministers will discuss the outcomes of the EU-AU summit and follow-up to the conclusions the summit adopted on 30 November. The UK will note the opportunity that Zimbabwe has to embrace a free and democratic future. We have shared, with EU and Five Eyes partners, our expectations for the new Government in order for the international community to re-engage and provide support: free and fair elections, economic and political reform, commitment to human rights and a clear message that Zimbabwe is open to international trade and investment.

#### *FAC (development)*

Development Ministers will discuss next steps on aid for trade following the publication of the European Commission's communication on "Achieving Prosperity through Trade and Investment: Updating the 2007 Joint EU Strategy on Aid for Trade". This discussion will focus on how EU co-operation can help developing economies take better advantage of trade opportunities as a means to finance their own way out of poverty.

The FAC is also expected to adopt conclusions on Thailand and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It hopes to adopt the Council decision launching PESCO and identify initial PESCO projects.

[HCWS324]

## HEALTH

### Paterson Case

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne):** Ian Paterson, a consultant breast surgeon who was employed by the Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust (HEFT), and had practising privileges in the independent sector at Spire Parkway and Spire Little Aston, was found guilty in April this year of 17 counts of wounding with intent. He was sentenced to jail for 20 years.

The Government are appalled by the actions of Ian Paterson and the harm that has affected a significant number of patients. The disclosures about the seriousness and extent of his malpractice are deeply and profoundly shocking.

The Government committed to ensuring lessons were learnt in the interest of patient protection and safety, both in the independent sector and the NHS.

Today, I am announcing the establishment of an independent, non-statutory inquiry into the circumstances and practices surrounding Ian Paterson that have affected so many patients. I have asked the Right Revd Graham James, Bishop of Norwich to chair the inquiry.

The inquiry should be informed by the victims of Paterson and families' concerns, and seek to learn from their experience. Therefore, the inquiry will look at the local care and treatment for private patients in the Solihull area, and review current and past practices to

establish if safeguards for patients treated at independent healthcare providers have fallen short of the standards the public have a right to expect. This will help to inform the broader lessons applicable to care provided by the independent healthcare sector across the country.

The inquiry is likely to consider issues including, but not limited to:

- the responsibility for the quality of care in the independent sector; appraisal, revalidation and multi-disciplinary working in the independent sector;

- information sharing, reporting of activity and raising concerns between the independent sector and the NHS;

- and the role of insurers of independent sector providers (including sharing of data), and arrangements for medical indemnity cover for clinicians in the independent sector.

The inquiry will also draw on issues raised in previous relevant reports about Paterson.

It is not intended to revisit the evidence that we already have about Paterson and that led to his conviction.

The terms of reference and other arrangements relating to the inquiry will be published in due course after a period of engagement.

The inquiry will be formally established from January 2018 and will report in summer 2019.

I am confident that Bishop Graham will oversee a thorough and independent non-statutory inquiry and deliver his recommendations swiftly.

[HCWS323]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Changes in Immigration Rules

**The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis):** The Secretary of State for the Home Department is today laying before the House a statement of changes in immigration rules, copies of which will be available in the Vote Office.

The offer the UK makes to highly skilled international leaders in science, research digital technology and the arts is being enhanced by doubling the number of tier 1 (exceptional talent) places to 2,000 visas per year.

As announced in the autumn Budget, and to support our ambitions on innovation and research and development, the changes also include provisions to enable internationally recognised global leaders in science, as well as those in digital technology, and the arts and creative sectors, endorsed under the tier 1 (exceptional talent) route, to apply for settlement after three years, amend tier 2 rules to allow for faster switching for tier 4 students below PhD level, while also making it easier to employ international researchers and members of established research teams by relaxing the labour market test under tier 2. The changes also provide for additional flexibility within our settlement rules to enable scientists and researchers who are called to assist with humanitarian and environmental crises to be absent from the UK for more than 180 days, if required.

The changes make other amendments to the settlement rules for work routes, for consistency. These relate to the 180-day absence provision, breaks in employment, time spent in the Crown dependencies, and the calculation of the qualifying period.

The rules for entrepreneurs are being simplified following customer feedback, to make them clearer and easier to follow (the requirements themselves are largely unchanged).

We continue to improve and modernise the UK's border and immigration system, which will now include moves toward further digitisation. These changes are required to facilitate the planned move toward introducing immigration permissions issued in electronic form. This will also allow trials to be undertaken that will test the operation of any new system. The rules are also being changed to permit holders of standard visit visas to transit the UK rather than having to get a different type of visa. This builds on the work, begun in April 2015, to simplify the immigration rules for visitors.

[HCWS327]

### National Transfer Scheme

**The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis):** The Government remain committed to helping and supporting children in need of international protection. In the year ending September 2017, the UK granted asylum or another form of leave to almost 9,000 children and nearly 49,000 children since 2010. Last month, we published a safeguarding strategy which sets out our vision and commitment to caring for and supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children. We look forward to working with partners to implement the actions in that strategy.

We have seen a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK in recent years and this has placed pressure on a small number of local authorities; particularly those such as Kent and Croydon. On 1 July 2016, the Government launched the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The NTS is a voluntary scheme that supports local authorities to transfer responsibility for unaccompanied children who are already in the UK to another local authority. The scheme seeks to achieve a fairer allocation of caring responsibilities across the country so that all children get the care and support they need.

The NTS has made significant progress. As at 1 October 2017, the scheme had transferred 555 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to other local authorities. The Government are very grateful for the way that participating local authorities have volunteered to care for unaccompanied children through the NTS. However, it is clear that there is more to do to ensure that no local authority is asked to look after more children than its local services can cope with and that the children receive the right level of care. There are approximately 4,500 unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children in local authority care in England and a small number of local authorities continue to look after a disproportionately high number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

The NTS is underpinned by provisions in the Immigration Act 2016. However, these provisions currently only apply to English local authorities, which makes it difficult for the other nations of the UK to participate.

I am pleased to be able to announce that the Government are introducing secondary legislation to extend the NTS to the whole of the United Kingdom. The statutory instrument provides a legislative base for transfer

arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This will allow the relevant authorities in each nation of the UK to participate in the NTS and ensure it is a truly national scheme. The NTS is voluntary and participation will remain a decision for each respective authority. We are committed to working closely with relevant authorities and partners to ensure the NTS takes account of the unique circumstances in each nation of the UK. However, we hope that by introducing this statutory instrument, we will encourage more local authorities to step forward and volunteer to support these children.

[HCWS326]

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Tailored Review of ICAI

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** I am today publishing a mandated review of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), in accordance with my responsibility as the Minister accountable to Parliament for it. In line with standard Cabinet Office guidance the review examined the case for ICAI to exist and assessed its efficiency and governance arrangements.

In recognition of ICAI's role as a scrutiny body, an independent challenge panel was appointed to ensure the objectivity and impartiality of the review process, and included members of the National Audit Office and Institute for Government. The Cabinet Office was satisfied that the review demonstrated an appropriate level of independence. The review acknowledges the importance

of ICAI's independence and its recommendations have been formulated to ensure this is preserved. The review gathered evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, drawn from Parliament, Government, the wider development sector and ICAI itself.

The review concluded that ICAI is necessary and that it should continue to be delivered by ICAI in its current form as a non-departmental public body with advisory functions. ICAI's functions are of particular importance given the statutory obligation for independent evaluation of the impact and value for money of aid arising from the 2015 International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act.

The review found that ICAI's work has contributed to increasing the impact and value for money of UK aid, and that ICAI is appreciated across the development sector for its scrutiny of aid impact. The review made a number of recommendations for further improving ICAI's effectiveness, including by developing improved measures of its own performance and by adopting a more consultative approach to developing recommendations that will increase their value.

Though the review found that ICAI should continue in its current form, it recommended changes to its delivery model to improve both its efficiency and effectiveness, including making its Chief Commissioner full-time. The review also assessed ICAI's governance arrangements and found them to be largely in-line with best practice for public bodies.

I am grateful to all those who contributed to the review, which will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and is available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tailored-review-of-the-independent-commission-for-aid-impact-icai>.

[HCWS325]



# Petition

Thursday 7 December 2017

## OBSERVATIONS

### TRANSPORT

#### Users of the No. 67 Bus Service in Torbay

*The petition of users of the No.67 bus service in Torbay,*

Declares that the cancellation of the number 67 bus service between Brixham, Marldon, Torbay Hospital and the Willows will have a detrimental impact on local residents, in particular, elderly residents.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Torbay Council to commit to providing a similar service to the previous No.67 service for sake of the local residents as soon as possible.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Dr Sarah Wollaston, *Official Report*, 7 November 2017; Vol. 630, c. 1437.]

[P002076]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):*

I recognise the importance of public transport for both the sustainability and independence of communities. Inadequate transport provision is a very real concern and can be a barrier to the prosperity of all.

Where there is not enough demand for a bus route to be commercially viable in its own right, all local authorities in England have powers to subsidise bus services which they consider socially necessary.

Decisions on subsidised bus services are a matter for individual English local authorities, in the light of their other spending priorities. The Government fully appreciate that local authorities are making difficult choices as a result of ongoing financial pressures.

The majority of public funding for local bus services is via block grant provided to local authorities in England from the Department for Communities and Local Government. However, my Department also provides around £40 million of Bus Service Operators Grant funding directly to English local authorities to help deliver bus services, of which Torbay Council receives around £24,000. Councils can use this money to support bus services in whatever way they see fit.

The Bus Services Act 2017 introduces a number of new tools to help local authorities improve local bus services in their area. Through partnership arrangements, we have enabled local authorities and bus operators to work constructively to provide better services for passengers.

I would strongly encourage local authorities and bus operators to work together, in consultation with local residents and businesses, to identify transport solutions that meet the economic and environmental challenges faced in the area and deliver the greatest benefits for the community.



# Ministerial Correction

*Thursday 7 December 2017*

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Fly-Tipping in Rural Areas

*The following is an extract from the response to a debate on fly-tipping in rural areas on 21 November 2017.*

**Dr Coffey:** It is the role of my Department to make sure local authorities have a full range of powers and tools to enable them to tackle fly-tipping, but it is the responsibility of local councils to use all the powers and tools available to them. Last year we gave councils in England the power to issue fixed penalty notices for small-scale fly-tipping. More than 56,000 such notices were issued against fly-tippers last year, and more than

half of all local authorities have implemented the new fixed penalty notices since they were introduced in May 2016. [*Official Report, 21 November 2017, Vol. 631, c. 1023.*]

*Letter of correction from Dr Thérèse Coffey.*

An error has been identified in my response to the Adjournment debate secured by the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris).

The correct response should have been:

**Dr Coffey:** It is the role of my Department to make sure local authorities have a full range of powers and tools to enable them to tackle fly-tipping, but it is the responsibility of local councils to use all the powers and tools available to them. Last year we gave councils in England the power to issue fixed penalty notices for small-scale fly-tipping. More than 56,000 **fixed penalty** notices were issued against fly-tippers last year, and more than half of all local authorities have implemented the new fixed penalty notices since they were introduced in May 2016.



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Thursday 7 December 2017

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**not later than  
Thursday 14 December 2017**

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PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

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**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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