

**Tuesday  
6 February 2018**

**Volume 635  
No. 93**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 6 February 2018**

---



# House of Commons

*Tuesday 6 February 2018*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### MIDDLE LEVEL BILL

*Motion made*, That the Bill, as amended, be now considered.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be considered on Tuesday 20 February.*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Grenfell Tower: Mental Health**

1. **Emma Dent Coad** (Kensington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support the mental health needs of survivors and the wider community affected by the Grenfell Tower fire. [903771]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** I am very grateful to have the opportunity to pay tribute to the NHS staff who continue to work tirelessly to support the victims of the fire and their families. So far, more than 4,000 contacts have been made. Over 400 adults are currently in treatment and 96 have completed their treatment.

**Emma Dent Coad:** We have heard the Minister's words and a litany of numbers. I have two further questions. First, is she considering long-term funding for mental health services around Grenfell, which will be needed, and need to be planned for, for possibly up to five years? Secondly, is she addressing the severe shortage of acute beds for those suffering mental health crises, which was mentioned earlier, particularly as there is an entire ward under lock and key at the Gordon Hospital due to lack of staff funding and a huge need for acute beds there?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Lady is quite right to press me on these issues. Clearly, there is going to be ongoing trauma, and we need to pay attention to that and make sure that there are adequate resources. I can assure her that this is very high on the list of priorities for the ministerial group. We have committed £23.9 million of national Government funds to address survivors'

needs, with additional expenditure on wider support. The autumn Budget committed a further £28 million to help support victims. I can also assure her that I am in regular contact with Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust to make sure that we are doing our bit to address this need.

#### **Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Trust**

2. **Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): If he will make an assessment of trends in the time taken between referral and treatment for patients at hospitals in Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust in the past 12 months. [903772]

**The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Stephen Barclay):** In the past 12 months, the average waiting time for patients to start consultant-led treatment at hospitals in northern Lincolnshire and Goole was about nine weeks. We recognise that some trusts face particular challenges with their waiting lists due to rising demand. That is why a package of support, including a system-wide improvement board, has been established within the trust.

**Melanie Onn:** The statistics that the Minister has given are very interesting. The Library has said that there is an average wait of 32 weeks—far longer than the nine weeks that he mentioned—and that it is six weeks longer in 2017 than it was in 2016. This is happening on his watch. What is he going to do? My constituents do not accept that it is good enough.

**Stephen Barclay:** I think the hon. Lady prepared her follow-up before hearing the answer. There is an improvement board established within the trust, chaired by NHS Improvement, that is tasked with reducing waiting times and ensuring that the standard is improved. Currently, the average time waited is 11 weeks for out-patients and seven weeks for in-patients.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Will the Minister give an assurance that the support that NHS Improvement is giving to the trust will continue? He will know that this is the second time that the trust has been in special measures, and clearly we need continuing support. Will he also assure us that he will visit the trust—a promise that was made by his predecessor?

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend is right to point out the need to give support to this trust. That is why a wider package of £1.6 billion of funding has been given to the NHS to improve accident and emergency and elective care performance. Alongside that, we have specific work through NHS Improvement to address some of the particular issues that he alluded to in his trust.

**Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con) *rose—*

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con) *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We might hear from the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) later, but I say to him in all friendly courtesy that while Kingswood no doubt has a great deal to be said for it, as does Congleton, both have one thing in common, and that is that they are a very long way from northern Lincolnshire.

### Health and Social Care Services

**3. Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What steps he is taking to integrate local health and social care services. [903773]

**The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Caroline Dinéage):** The fact that the Department has been renamed the Department of Health and Social Care reflects both their interdependence and our commitment to achieve co-ordinated care tailored to individual needs. The better care fund is a national integration programme that helps the NHS and local government to deliver better, more joined-up services.

**Luke Hall:** I thank the Minister for that answer and welcome her to her place. The proposal to build a community health centre in Thornbury and Frenchay is an essential part of joining up health and social care in South Gloucestershire. Will the Minister join me in highlighting the importance of Thornbury health centre and in pressing South Gloucestershire clinical commissioning group to make progress with the project as quickly as possible, after years of unnecessary delays?

**Caroline Dinéage:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. He is right to do so, and proposals such as those for Thornbury health centre are crucial for ensuring that health and social care are truly integrated and centred around each individual in the community. I am advised that South Gloucestershire CCG remains committed to progressing those plans as soon as possible and that the local NHS expects to be able to provide an update on plans next month.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The Minister will be aware of the situation surrounding pain infusion treatment for patients in Hull and East Riding. Many of the 86 patients who lose that treatment will require increasing levels of social care. Consultants have even written letters to the CCG to say that if that treatment is removed, there is an increased risk of mortality for those patients. Will the Minister meet me urgently to discuss that and write to the CCG to ask it to urgently review its decision in the light of the evidence from consultants?

**Caroline Dinéage:** Of course blanket bans on treatments are unacceptable, and decisions on treatments should always be made locally by doctors, based on clinical assessment. I understand that those patients will be offered an alternative, more rounded service and that the CCGs have arranged for each patient to meet their consultant to discuss their treatment. Where there is evidence of rationing, we expect NHS England to ensure that CCGs are not breaching their duties.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the integration of health and social care is so important to the future success of the NHS that everything needs to be done to speed up the programme to integrate them better? Will she join me in encouraging a speedier approach to that method in Surrey, Sussex and Kent?

**Caroline Dinéage:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The better care fund is already having a fantastic impact in the area. We are developing metrics for assessing

progress on integration by local area, particularly at the interface of health and social care. We need to proceed with this as rapidly as possible, and I am sure that with his backing, that will happen in his local area.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): It is of course very important that we see integration of the two services, but the fact remains that there is just not enough money. Over a year ago, one of the Minister's predecessors praised my authority in Halton for the work it was doing in this area, but Halton is now on the brink in terms of the money it has and its ability to deliver its statutory duties. There is simply not enough money, and the Government keep trying to avoid that.

**Caroline Dinéage:** We have provided £2 billion of extra funding over the next three years to help councils commission high-quality services, in addition to giving councils access to up to £9.25 billion of dedicated social care funding by 2019-20.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Will the Minister look at the benefits of independent living schemes such as Priory View, pioneered by Central Bedfordshire Council, which bring reduced hospital admissions and reduced demands on social care through greater socialisation and more use of exercise classes?

**Caroline Dinéage:** Independent living schemes can keep people living healthier, more independent lives for much longer and provide the comradeship and camaraderie that keep people active and healthier. My hon. Friend is right to raise their importance, and the Government very much support them.

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): With reference to the integration of health and social care, the Minister may be aware that I have two outstanding respite and rehab homes in Eastbourne called Milton Grange and Firwood House. They are both under threat of closure by the county council, which says that central Government are not giving it enough money. Those homes serve a crucial purpose in supporting the local hospital. Will the Minister agree to meet me and representatives from the county council to work out a way to find the funds to keep both those vital homes open?

**Caroline Dinéage:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to stand up for the good-quality respite in his local area. The Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to shape local markets and ensure that they give a sustainable, high-quality local offer. I would be more than happy to meet him to discuss that further.

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Minister to her place. One model of integration that has aroused considerable concern is the so-called accountable care organisation model. Many are concerned that that means greater private sector involvement, and given legitimate worries about Carillion going bust, Capita not being able to support GPs and Virgin suing the NHS, those concerns are well founded. Can the Minister rule out any private sector involvement in ACOs? Will she also delay laying the relevant regulations to establish an ACO until after the two judicial reviews and the NHS England consultation?

**Caroline Dinéage:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this. NHS England is consulting on that at the moment, and I can confirm that no regulations will be laid until that consultation has been completed.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** I am extremely grateful to the Minister for offering us that clarification. May I therefore ask her about funding? The integration of health and social care needs more funding, yet the NHS is going through the biggest financial squeeze in its history and social care has been cut by billions since 2010. A few moments ago, the Minister said that the funding is adequate, but if the funding is adequate across health and social care, why are delayed discharges of care up 50%, and why did NHS England say on Friday that for the rest of this year the A&E target has in effect been abandoned?

**Caroline Dinéage:** We recognise that there are pressures on our social care as the population ages. In the short term, we have of course made the extra £2 billion of funding available to local authorities; in the medium term, we need to make sure that best practice is observed across all local authorities and NHS trusts; and in the long term, we will be coming forward with a Green Paper on social care later this year.

#### Routes into Nursing

4. **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): What steps he is taking to broaden routes into nursing. [903774]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** The NHS needs more nurses, which is why we are making big changes for new entries into the profession, including the new nurse associate role and new nurse degree apprenticeships.

**Bim Afolami:** I am glad to hear that the Secretary of State values the degree apprenticeship as a way to provide further routes into nursing, but will he consider working with the Treasury and across the Government to increase the funding that educational establishments receive from the Institute for Apprenticeships for nursing courses, to further incentivise universities and colleges to offer more places on those courses?

**Mr Hunt:** I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent question. It will strengthen my hand with the Department for Education, which decides what levels of funding are made available from the Institute for Apprenticeships. It has actually given us the highest level of funding, at £27,000, but we never say no to more.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): But will the Secretary of State admit that he made a basic error by scrapping nurse bursaries, which has led to a 23% fall in the number of people applying to nurse courses? Why does he not look at that if he wants to widen the entrance into nursing?

**Mr Hunt:** I am not sure whether the hon. Lady was listening to the answer I just gave, but the truth is—

**Ms Eagle:** I always listen to you.

**Mr Hunt:** I am most grateful. That is a very rare compliment, so I shall savour it. I would gently say to her that the point about nurse degree apprenticeships is

that it is possible to transition into nursing from being a healthcare assistant without any fees being paid at all. That is why it is a huge and highly significant change.

**Mr Speaker:** As the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) is sporting what appears to me to be a very fetching suffragette rosette, it is perhaps timely to record that in the great success our national health service has been under successive Governments, I think I am right in saying, as things stand, that well over 70% of the people who make it great are women.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): Following the recent inquiry by the Select Committee on Health into the nursing workforce, we absolutely welcome the new routes into nursing, including the new role of nursing associate. However, one of the issues highlighted strongly was the need to retain our existing nursing workforce as well as to recruit into it. Will the Secretary of State comment on that?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend speaks very wisely—we do need to be better at retaining our existing workforce. I think that is why the Treasury has given me extra latitude in negotiations on the pay rise—those discussions are currently happening—but we also need to be much better at flexible working and at recognising the challenges people have in their ordinary working lives.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Unlike in Scotland, where student nurses receive free tuition and a nursing bursary of over £6,500 a year, nurses in England now face debts of £50,000 on graduation. Owing to that, training applications in England have dropped by a third since 2015, and the new nursing apprenticeship attracted only 30 trainees against a target of 1,000. Will the Secretary of State not accept that he got it wrong, and reinstate the nursing bursary?

**Mr Hunt:** I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman say that, because we have published a draft of a workforce strategy in this country, but I notice that Audit Scotland says that in Scotland there is a lack of a long-term strategic plan for the workforce. I gently say to him that there are workforce pressures across the United Kingdom. We have a plan to dramatically increase the number of nurses that we employ in the NHS, and I am sure many people in Scotland would like to see the same there.

**Martyn Day:** The Secretary of State has claimed that the removal of the bursary would fund 10,000 extra training places, but the first 5,000 will start only this autumn and the nurses will qualify only in 2021. With more than 36,000 nursing vacancies in England, more nurses leaving than joining and a 90% drop in EU nurses coming to the UK because of Brexit, exactly who does he expect to care for patients in the meantime?

**Mr Hunt:** As we discussed earlier, we are broadening the routes into nursing from just traditional higher education courses, including nurse apprenticeships and people being able to train on the job over four years in a hospital. We hope that a whole group of healthcare assistants who currently find it difficult to get into nursing can become nurses. I think that would be very welcome in Scotland as well.

**Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on progress made in reducing the cost of agency nurses so that the money can be reinvested in full-time nursing?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to do that. It is one of the great successes of NHS Improvement, which should be celebrated, that it has brought down the amount spent on agency nursing by £1 billion in the last couple of years. That is a huge achievement. Every penny of that goes back into frontline care.

**Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): The Government cut the number of nurse training places in 2010, and when they scrapped bursaries applications from mature students suffered particularly. What is the point of blaming trusts for hiring agency staff when the Government simply do not train enough nurses to fill the vacancies?

**Mr Hunt:** Perhaps I should set the record straight for the hon. Lady. We have 52,000 nurses in training—more than was ever the case under the last Labour Government, who were planning to cut nurse training places by 6%. We are planning to increase them by 25%. That shows our commitment to nursing.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Yesterday, the Royal College of Nursing reported on the total failure of Government policies to increase the nursing workforce. As we have just heard, the Government hoped to recruit 1,000 trainees to the nursing apprenticeship, but ended up with just 30. This year, the number applying to university to study nursing has so far fallen by a staggering 33%. We have a workforce crisis exacerbated by badly thought out policies, so is it not time that the Secretary of State admitted that scrapping the bursary was a mistake?

**Mr Hunt:** I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Gentleman, but that is not the first time that he has presented a somewhat incomplete picture of what is actually happening. In the last five years, we have 15,700 more nurses, and the reason for those vacancies and for the pressure is that, as he knows very well, under the last Labour Government we had Mid Staffs, which was a crisis of short staffing that this Government are putting right. That is why we want to recruit those extra nurses.

### Children and Young People: Mental Health

5. **Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve mental health provision for children and young people. [903775]

8. **Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve mental health provision for children and young people. [903780]

13. **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve mental health provision for children and young people. [903785]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** This week is Children's Mental Health Week, and still too many children and young people wait too long for their mental health provision in

the NHS. That is why, by the end of next year, we will have invested an extra £1.4 billion, meaning that 70,000 extra children and young people are seen every year.

**Michelle Donelan:** A constituent's 14-year-old son suffers severe obsessive compulsive disorder, resulting in self-harm. Treatment options have failed and his doctor recommends an intensive residential programme, but as Ministers are aware, places are very limited. He has been waiting seven weeks and counting, with 24-hour parental support and supervision. What more can be done to ensure that that boy and other adolescents who are in desperate need of help get that help before it is too late?

**Mr Hunt:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue, and I understand that in that particular case clinicians are meeting this week to resolve those issues. She is right: we need to expand the number of beds available for children and young people. They are at a record level—1,440, and that went up by another 81 last year—but more needs to be done, which is why we published our children and young people's mental health Green Paper.

**Edward Argar:** I have been approached by a number of my constituents in Leicestershire who are concerned about the wait between a referral to child and adolescent mental health services and the allocation of a named caseworker and formal treatment. Will my right hon. Friend enlarge on how the steps that he is taking, which he has set out, will help to reduce such waits in Leicestershire and across the country?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to do that. The simple truth is that it is a tragedy for every child who has to wait too long to access mental health care, because half of all mental health conditions become established before the age of 14. If we do not nip them in the bud, they can get a lot worse. What are we doing? We are setting up a whole new service inside schools to spot such problems earlier and we are going to introduce a waiting time target for CAMHS appointments.

**Kirstene Hair:** In 2016-17, 65% of young people in England with eating disorders started urgent treatment within one week of referral. What has been done to ensure that the target of 95% by 2020 will be reached? Does the Secretary of State share my belief that waiting time targets are a vital tool for improving eating disorder treatment and should be in place in all parts of the United Kingdom?

**Mr Hunt:** I absolutely agree with that. I join my hon. Friend in supporting the introduction of waiting time targets in Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom. How are we doing so far? In terms of the need for urgent treatment for eating disorders, we are hitting 79%, so we are on our way to the 95% target and we want to get there as soon as we can.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I listened very carefully to what the Secretary of State said about the additional funding that is supposed to be reaching the frontline, but the Young Person's Advisory Service, which is the main service for young people's mental health in Liverpool, has seen a £757,000 cut—a

cut of 43%—in this financial year. There are now 412 children in Liverpool waiting more than 28 weeks for an assessment—not even for treatment. It is absolutely shocking. How can he stand there in young people and children’s mental health week and say that everything is rosy?

**Mr Hunt:** I did not; I said the opposite. I said that we need to do a lot more and I told the House what we are doing. If the hon. Lady looks at what is happening in her own clinical commissioning group, she will see that the proportion that is spent on mental health has gone up from 12.3% to 13%. She will see that this Government have done a huge amount on mental health. In 13 years, Labour did not have any waiting time targets for mental health and did not introduce parity of esteem—a whole range of things that are now happening and that she should support.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Ind): Will the Government commission more extensive research into the causes of mental ill health among children and young people, both pre and post-natal, with a view to preventing as much ill health as possible?

**Mr Hunt:** We are absolutely going to do that. We have a big programme of expansion in perinatal health support, because there is a lot of evidence that pressures on mothers around the time of birth transmit to their children and can leave lasting damage.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Specialist mental health crisis care for young people in south Cumbria is available only between the hours of 9 and 5 from Monday to Friday. Does the Secretary of State agree that in the light of the Care Quality Commission’s recent damning report of the partnership trust, that is not acceptable? Will he join me in asking the Morecambe Bay CCG to ensure that there is out-of-hours and weekend care for all people?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to look into that issue. The hon. Gentleman’s colleague, the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), did a huge amount to set up crisis care provision around the country. We need to build on that for the simple reason that, if we are to have parity of esteem, people need to be able to get help in a mental health crisis, just as they are if something goes wrong with their physical health.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as well as improving the treatment of adolescent ill health, everything possible needs to be done to prevent crisis from occurring in the first place? Does he agree that we need more research into why we are seeing a surge in Cheltenham and elsewhere in the world, so that clinicians can best tailor their response?

**Mr Hunt:** This is something that my hon. Friend has thought a lot about. A particular area of concern is the growth in mental health problems in young women between the ages of 18 and 24. We are looking carefully at whether that relates to social media use, which is an additional pressure that many of us did not face when we were that age. I thank him for his campaigning on this issue.

19. [903791] **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): The figures show that, on average, children and young people have to visit their GP three times before a referral is made for a specialist mental health assessment. Sometimes, they then have to wait six months for treatment. In Lewisham, the CAMHS budget is being cut, which is likely to result in even longer waiting times for treatment. The right hon. Gentleman said that these waiting times are a tragedy, but how bad do things have to get before the Government take action?

**Mr Hunt:** With respect, we are taking action. Last year, spending on mental health went up by £575 million and four out of five CCGs increased their mental health spend by more than their overall spend. This year, all CCGs will do that. That will apply in Lewisham, as it will everywhere else in the country.

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Under plans announced by NHS England, child victims of sexual assault in Stoke-on-Trent would have to travel as far as Birmingham to receive the vital support that they need. Will the Secretary of State agree to look urgently into the proposals to remove child sexual assault referral services from the city?

**Mr Hunt:** I will happily do so.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Research by the Children’s Commissioner revealed that the spend on children and young people’s mental health services varied by CCG from 0.2% to 9%, resulting in services in some areas being described as “shockingly poor”. Can the Secretary of State therefore explain the reason for the variation, and will he commit today to matching Labour’s pledge to increase the proportion of the mental health budget spend on CAMHS services?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Lady is right to shine a light on that variation, and that is why this Government have introduced Ofsted ratings for all CCGs—to make sure that we understand. It is not just in children and young people’s mental health, but in all mental health where we see that variation. Specifically when it comes to children and young people’s mental health, she will be pleased to know that last year overall spending went up by 20%, and the Green Paper that we published announced an additional £300 million in investment.

### Children’s Health

6. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What plans his Department has to improve children’s health. [903776]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** This Government want to see all children and young people get the best start in life. We are implementing a wide range of policies to improve child health, including the most ambitious childhood obesity plan in the world, transformation of children’s mental health and maternity services, improving immunisation rates and tackling child sexual abuse.

**Gavin Newlands:** The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health recently praised NHS Scotland’s innovations to improve children’s health. The Scottish

initiative Childsmile, which is now 10 years old, has greatly improved children's dental health, reducing fillings by 24% and cutting annual dental treatment by £5 million. It is good that the UK Government have finally set up trial sites, but with multiple dental extractions under general anaesthetic up by 11%, why is this initiative not being rolled out to all children in England?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight that, and we are always keen to respond to any representations made on this very important issue. We are also very keen to learn from the other nations about this area, because it is clear that the more we can do with early intervention in childhood, the better we protect people's long-term health. I will look more specifically into that.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): As a children's doctor, children's health is very important to me, and the case of children's doctor, Dr Bawa-Garba, worries me and doctors up and down the country. In NHS practice, I have seen the adverse effect on reflective practice and the impact that it has on staff morale. Ultimately, that will impact on patient safety. I know that the Secretary of State shares my concerns, and I ask him to tell the House what he is going to do about it.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be addressing that in a little while. The whole issue of reflective learning is important. We should not, through this case, prevent people from being honest about the experiences that they have had.

20. [903793] **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Energy drinks packed with caffeine have been connected to problems with children's health. Tesco, Asda and Aldi have banned the sale of these drinks to under-16s, so will the Government do the same?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** We are becoming increasingly conscious of drinks with additional unnatural stimulants and their impact on people's health generally, but obviously that becomes more acute with children's health, so we will look more closely at it. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has highlighted the initiatives that have been taken by individual retailers, because it is up to them to implement good practice.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way to achieve strong health and good mental health for children is at the very earliest stages and through forming a strong attachment between that child and their parent in the first 1,001 days from conception? If so, why is there not more in the mental health Green Paper about perinatal mental health?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The Green Paper very much focuses on what we are doing in schools, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right. He highlights the earliest of early intervention, and one reason why we are investing so much more in perinatal mental health is to ensure that the bonds between mother and baby are as strong as they can possibly be.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Following the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) and the Minister's answer, may I revisit the issue of energy drinks? She might know that a 500 ml can of energy drink contains 12 teaspoons of sugar and the same amount of caffeine as a double espresso, yet energy drinks are being sold for as little as 25p to children as young as 10, and around one in three young people say they regularly consume them. Given the health risks associated with energy drinks, will she tell me more about what steps she and her Department are taking to reduce energy drink sales to and consumption by children?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Lady will know that action against sugar is very much part of the childhood obesity plan that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), is taking forward, but there is a lot more we can do to address the concerns about caffeine, which I know is high on his "to do" list. We will no doubt have more exchanges on this subject in due course.

### Maternity Transformation Programme

7. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What progress his Department has made on implementing the maternity transformation programme. [903779]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** Our ambition was to halve the number of maternal deaths, neonatal deaths, neonatal injuries and stillbirths by 2030, but because of the progress we have made with our maternity safety programme, we have brought that forward to 2025.

**Alison Thewliss:** I am glad to hear that progress is being made. The World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative's 2016 report highlighted several gaps in access to breastfeeding support, including deficiencies in clinical training and a lack of integration between the NHS and voluntary sector services. What can be done through the maternity transformation programme to ensure that women can access, and health professionals can provide, the best-quality infant feeding advice right across the country?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight that area. It is one of six high-impact areas we are focusing on throughout the country. We are making progress, but we know we could do a lot better.

### NHS Trusts: VAT Status

9. **Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): If he will hold discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the VAT status of NHS trusts. [903781]

**The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Stephen Barclay):** There are no plans to hold discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the VAT status of NHS trusts.

**Karin Smyth:** I am grateful for that reply, although I suggest it ought to be reconsidered. NHS trusts desperate to avoid financial difficulties appear to have found a

new magic money tree: setting up wholly owned subsidiaries to avoid paying substantial amounts of tax to the Treasury. Rather than encouraging this tax dodging and further fragmenting the NHS, why do the Secretary of State and his friend the Chancellor not either ban this practice or agree to let them all have the VAT exemptions?

**Stephen Barclay:** The Department wrote to all NHS and foundation trusts in September 2017 to remind them that tax avoidance schemes should not be entered into in any circumstances, but the hon. Lady makes a slightly strange point. She seems to be arguing that NHS hospitals are, in essence, paying too much tax to the Treasury, rather than having that money within the NHS. These subsidiaries are 100% owned by trusts themselves.

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): The Government have already legislated for but not implemented a proposal to introduce a £95,000 limit on exit payments for public servants in the NHS. Would it not be sensible, in the meantime, to charge NHS trusts VAT on any exit payments in excess of £95,000 to deter this waste of public resources?

**Stephen Barclay:** I admire how the VAT element of the original question was brought into a discussion of exit payments. As my hon. Friend will be well aware, I visited the issue of exit payments frequently as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and I am happy to discuss it further with him.

#### National Food Crime Unit

10. **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): If he will increase funding for the Food Standards Agency's national food crime unit. [903782]

**The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Caroline Dinéage):** The Food Standards Agency's national food crime unit is crucial to protecting consumers from serious criminal activity that impacts on the safety of their food and drink. I understand that the FSA is exploring options for the unit's future funding, and a decision is expected in late spring.

**Neil Parish:** The FSA is answerable to the Department of Health and Social Care for food safety, but there are a lot of assurance schemes that do not really answer to anybody and which the FSA needs to be able to bring together. That is where the crime unit could do a really good job, so anything the Minister can do to get that money and get the crime unit up and running would be very good.

**Caroline Dinéage:** I thank the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee for his advice. I know that he is keen and astute on this subject. Ensuring that food businesses meet their safety responsibilities is, of course, one of the FSA's most important roles. It is developing a new regulatory model and actively engaging with third-party assurance scheme owners to determine how information and data can be shared and more effectively used by regulators.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I send a brief message of congratulation to the Secretary of State for his rapid response to President Trump's remarks about the values of the NHS?

As chair of the Westminster Commission on Autism, let me now ask the Secretary of State a serious question. We are about to produce a report on the fake medicine that is sold to families with an autistic child. When the report is published, in the next few days, will the Secretary of State act very quickly to stop this dreadful trade?

**Mr Speaker:** I am not quite sure that that is altogether related to the main question.

**Mr Sheerman:** It is related to the Food Standards Agency.

**Mr Speaker:** Possibly. Anyway, it was a worthy effort, and I will give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt. Let us now hear from the Minister.

**Caroline Dinéage:** As the hon. Gentleman was so very charming to the Secretary of State, we will of course look into the issue.

#### Hospitals in Special Measures

11. **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): What recent progress he has made on improving the performance of hospitals in special measures. [903783]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** It is five years today since the landmark publication of the Francis report on the Mid Staffordshire Foundation NHS Trust. Since then the NHS has made a huge number of changes, not the least being that 34 trusts have gone into special measures and 19 have come out. I particularly congratulate the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust on coming out of special measures in January and securing a "good" score for its caring: that was a fantastic achievement by its staff.

**Julian Sturdy:** Given that York's local health service is in special measures, the additional funds in the Budget to deal with winter health pressures were very welcome. I am pleased to say that York NHS has already received a tranche of those funds, but the remainder of its share has not been released, although discussions with NHS Improvement are ongoing. Will the Secretary of State undertake to look into the situation, as a matter of urgency?

**Mr Hunt:** I will happily do so.

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware of the importance of King's College Hospital to my constituents. In 2009, it was rated "excellent" and one of the top hospitals in the country; now it is missing its A&E waiting time targets and a key cancer treatment target, there has been a fourfold increase in the number of cancelled operations, and it is in special measures. The Government must take some responsibility for that. They must not wash their hands of it. Will they step up to the plate and help King's by, for instance, giving it the resources that it needs?

**Mr Hunt:** Let me reassure the right hon. and learned Lady that we do not wash our hands of any trusts that go into special measures. The point of the special

measures regime is to highlight where Government intervention is necessary. I know the right hon. and learned Lady will agree that a huge amount of very fine treatment happens at King's every single day, but it is having profound issues in relation to the management of its finances and some of its waiting times, which is why we are doing everything we can to support it.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): With a high delayed-discharge rate of 10%, Kettering General Hospital, which is in special measures, has 60 patients on any one day who have completed their treatment and await their transfer into the community. Northamptonshire County Council has been given millions of pounds, via the better care fund, but it is simply not up to the job. What can be done in those circumstances?

**Mr Hunt:** I am well aware of the pressures at Kettering. It is a very busy hospital, and it has undergone a number of changes of management. However, I can reassure my hon. Friend that a big improvement package is there to support it and that we want to take it out of special measures as soon as possible.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The previous chair of King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust resigned because he had concluded that the funding provided for King's had placed the trust in an impossible position. The current interim chair has said that the proportion of GDP spent on health and social care needs to rise to match that in other European countries if our NHS is to be sustainable. When will the Secretary of State heed the warning cries and commit the funding that King's and, more widely, our NHS need in order to deliver care to our constituents?

**Mr Hunt:** We spend 9.9% of our GDP on health. The European Union spends 15%, and the richer EU countries spend 9.6%—slightly less than us, on average. We are able to spend more because this Government put the economy back on its feet.

### Pharmacy Services

12. **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What plans he has to expand the services provided by pharmacies to assist GPs. [903784]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Steve Brine):** It is good to be back.

As I have repeatedly said at the Dispatch Box, pharmacies are a vital frontline service for our NHS, with over 1.2 million health-related visits every day. Community pharmacies have again stepped up during this winter period, and I thank them for their hard work. They have vaccinated more than 1 million people against seasonal flu since October. The Government are committed to ensuring that pharmacies and pharmacists are further embedded in the wider health service.

**Mrs Latham:** I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he come to Derby to meet a constituent who has pharmacies that are working very hard to keep patients out of hospital, therefore saving the NHS money through their innovative ideas?

**Steve Brine:** Yes, I will do that. I think we have a provisional date in the diary in early March. We continue to promote the Pharmacy First scheme. Next month, we will launch the £2 million Stay Well pharmacy campaign to continue to promote the idea of community pharmacy as the first port of call for many minor health concerns. I am out and about visiting pharmacies—I was at one last week—and I will be very pleased to come to see my hon. Friend.

21. [903795] **Tony Lloyd** (Rochdale) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that a disproportionate number of GPs are currently heading towards retirement. Therefore, support for primary care services is vital. What practical steps can be taken to increase the use of pharmacies and to seek alternatives to GP services more generally?

**Steve Brine:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are a record number of training places. We know that one of the main reasons why GPs leave general practice is retirement, which is why we have put in place comprehensive measures to ensure that we meet our commitment to deliver an extra 5,000 GPs in the NHS by 2020. GP career plus, the GP retention scheme and the national GP induction and refresher scheme will all help get to valuable experienced GPs back into our NHS, doing the valuable work our constituents so benefit from.

### GP Services

14. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase the capacity and availability of GP services. [903786]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Steve Brine):** We recognise the acute shortages in general practice, which is why we remain, as I said in my previous answer, committed to delivering the additional doctors in general practice by 2020. Millions of patients have already benefited from being able to access evening and weekend GP appointments. We expect everyone in England to have access to this by March 2019.

**Huw Merriman:** I am fortunate to work very closely with the GPs in my constituency. It would be appear that, for a variety of reasons, younger GPs are not as likely to buy into the partnership model as their predecessors. Does the Minister agree that we need a mixed model of both private partnership contractor and direct NHS state provision if we are to get GPs to the places where the public need them?

**Steve Brine:** My hon. Friend works very closely with the GPs and commissioning groups in his constituency and they value him greatly as a local MP. We back the partnership model. As the Secretary of State said last month at the Royal College of General Practitioners, we believe in its many benefits as the cornerstone of primary care. That is why we are embarking on a new piece of work to explore other models with the British Medical Association and the RCGP, which have kindly agreed to work with us on this, and to look at the partnership model in the context of primary care at scale.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Dr Williams, you wanted to speak a moment ago; have you abandoned the idea?

**Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab) *indicated assent.*

**Mr Speaker:** Very well.

**Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): NHS figures continue to show an alarming decline in the number of family doctors working across the north-east, which is why I am supporting the University of Sunderland bid to establish a new medical school. Does the Minister accept that prioritising training places in areas of greatest need is the best long-term solution to the crisis facing general practice?

**Steve Brine:** There are record numbers in training, and I take note of the hon. Lady's bid for the training school. One reason the Department and my brief have placed such importance on recruiting new GPs into the NHS in England and on making sure that people can stay working in the NHS in England is that we see general practice, rightly, as the cornerstone of the health service.

### Topical Questions

T1. [903796] **Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities. And you wear it well, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I do not know whether the right hon. Lady is referring to my age, a proposition on which I think the House would have to divide, or the rosette. [*Interruption.*] Yes, I thought she meant the rosette.

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** On the day that we mark the 100th anniversary of giving a voice to women, I want to update the House on concerns in the medical profession that we may not be giving a voice to doctors and other clinicians who want the freedom to be able to learn from mistakes. The House will know that, as a Government Minister, I cannot comment on a court ruling, but it is fair to say that the recent Dr Bawa-Garba case has caused huge concern, so today I can announce that I have asked Professor Sir Norman Williams, former president of the Royal College of Surgeons and my senior clinical adviser, to conduct a rapid review into the application of gross negligence manslaughter in healthcare.

Working with senior lawyers, Sir Norman will review how we ensure the vital role of reflective learning, openness and transparency is protected so that mistakes are learned from and not covered up, how we ensure that there is clarity about where the line is drawn between gross negligence manslaughter and ordinary human error in medical practice so that doctors and other health professionals know where they stand in respect of criminal liability or professional misconduct, and any lessons that need to be learned by the General Medical Council and other professional regulators. I will engage the devolved Administrations, the Justice Secretary and the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care in this vital review, which will report to me before the end of April 2018.

**Anna Soubry:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer—or rather, for that statement—and also for the robust tweets that he makes on that and many other issues. Would he be amenable to the idea of following on Twitter the Oliver King Foundation? On the foundation's advice, I have written to all the schools in Broxtowe urging them to install defibrillators. This is an important project. What assistance is the Department of Health giving to such an admirable charity and such an excellent project?

**Mr Hunt:** It is a fantastic charity. The boy concerned would have been 19 very shortly. It is a very sad story. I thank my right hon. Friend for her campaigning on this issue. We do indeed need to ensure that we have atrial fibrillators everywhere necessary to prevent these tragedies.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I welcome the review that the Health and Social Care Secretary has just announced. I also welcome the addition of social care to his role and the Government's belated realisation that social care should be a Cabinet-level role, as Labour recognised with its shadow Cabinet in 2010. Yesterday, the Alzheimer's Society reported that care homes were turning away people with advanced dementia—or even evicting them, sadly—because care providers do not get enough money from local authorities to cover the cost of their care. Will the Health and Social Care Secretary now be arguing with Treasury colleagues for the funding that is so badly needed to ensure that people with dementia are not evicted from care homes due to a lack of funding?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Lady always speaks powerfully about the social care system. One of the key parts of the social care Green Paper that we are currently working through is on market stabilisation. We have seen a number of care homes go under, although the number of beds overall has remained broadly stable, but our particular concern is, as she rightly points out, people in the advanced stages of dementia who might not be able to get the care that they want. This is a key focus of our work.

T7. [903802] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): I have had concerns highlighted to me over the national cancer patient experience survey in the light of the introduction of a new national opt-out model. Can the Minister confirm that the survey will continue to deliver the same high-quality data annually and can he tell me when a final decision on its format is likely to be made?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Steve Brine):** I have listened carefully to cancer charities, clinicians and patients on the importance of the cancer patient experience survey. I have been clear that, whatever form the CPES takes as a result of the changes to how confidential data is shared, we want the survey to continue with a methodology as close to that of the current survey as possible.

T2. [903797] **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Last week at PMQs, the Prime Minister made an inaccurate statement about the emergency health services in Wales. The chair of the UK Statistics Authority concluded that the Prime Minister's comparison was not valid.

Comparisons on the performance of our NHS are important, so will Government Ministers check their partisan figures in future?

**The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Stephen Barclay):** It is interesting, looking at the comparisons, to see that the NHS in Wales appears to have changed a number of them, to make it more difficult to compare performance between England and Wales. The more scrutiny there is of the performance in Wales—where clinicians say that the best performance often equates to the worst performance in England—the more we will see the need for serious changes in the way in which the NHS delivers its services in Wales.

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): In Sutton, we have hugely exciting plans for a London cancer hub, working with the Royal Marsden Hospital and the Institute of Cancer Research, on a single campus to provide a global centre for cancer innovation that will in turn provide a huge boost for our local economy, including 13,000 new jobs. Will the Minister join me in Sutton to see the opportunity at first hand? Will he also tell us how such a project can help to deliver on our Government's life sciences strategy?

**Steve Brine:** I am keen to visit my hon. Friend in Sutton, so let us fix a date as soon as we can. Cancer survival rates are at an all-time high, but I like the idea of a one-stop shop, and the hub that he talks about could be very exciting.

T3. [903798] **Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): The delivery of sustainability and transformation plans is too dependent on the NHS estates strategy, as discussed in the Naylor review, and there is great concern that our NHS assets will be sold off quickly, cheaply and without transparency to make up for Government underfunding. Will the Minister agree to pause the process to accommodate the urgent need for parliamentary scrutiny?

**Stephen Barclay:** The King's Fund has said that STPs offer the best hope for the NHS and its partners to sustain and transform the delivery of healthcare, so the King's Fund endorses this recommendation. As the right hon. Lady will know, we announced an additional £325 million of capital funding in the spring Budget to invest in local areas, and in the autumn Budget we committed an additional £10 billion package of capital investment over this Parliament.

**George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Last week, our former colleague Tessa, now Baroness, Jowell gave an inspiring speech about her battle with brain cancer. At this first Health questions after that speech, I am sure that colleagues will join me in paying tribute to her work and will agree that she spoke with courage, grace and the desire to make her suffering prevent others from having to go through the same. Will the Secretary of State assure me that last week's report from the brain cancer research taskforce, which I set up as a Minister, will be taken seriously in the Department and that everything will be done to ensure that brain cancer, which has been something of a Cinderella for years, receives the support and funding that it deserves so that Tessa's words were not in vain?

**Steve Brine:** I thank my hon. Friend for his work in this job on this subject. The Secretary of State was in the other place to listen to Baroness Jowell's speech, and I read it and watched it back. It was a moving and brave piece of work. We take this matter seriously. My colleague Lord O'Shaughnessy has the report, which we are going through line by line, and he and I will jointly chair a roundtable on the subject in the next few weeks.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that any accountable care organisations that he establishes will not be able to use commercial confidentiality excuses to evade scrutiny under freedom of information legislation?

**Mr Hunt:** Public money is public money, and Members have a right to know how it is being spent, so we will absolutely ensure that those contracts are signed in a fair way.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): As the Secretary of State carries out his social care funding review, I urge him to look carefully at whether we should look again at implementing the Dilnot commission's proposals. Given that we legislated for them, they are the only way that we are going to tackle the issue with the sufficient urgency.

**Mr Hunt:** At the heart of the Dilnot proposals was the idea of risk pooling—that there is a randomness in the illnesses that affect us in the later years of our life that we would want, as a society, to do something about. I will confirm what the Prime Minister said in the election campaign: we will consult on a cap on social care costs.

T4. [903799] **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): I am shocked that my local hospital, Southport and Ormskirk, has unused bed and theatre capacity despite the huge winter crisis and the pressures on the NHS locally. In that same trust last night, the Virgin-run walk-in centre had a computer glitch and told people, "Either go to A&E or come back tomorrow." Has the Department made any assessment of the number of beds and theatre hours that could have been sourced to relieve winter pressures and save lives?

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Lady highlights an important point about the variance in performance between trusts and how we look at some of the lessons from, for example, Lords Carter's work on efficiency, rotas and how to maximise the value of funding. I am happy to consider her specific point, but she is right that how we manage the patient pathway, in particular the 43% of hospital beds occupied by 5% of patients, is a key challenge.

**Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): For the first time ever in Devon and Plymouth, GP practices are struggling to recruit new doctors and new partners in particular and are spending a fortune on locums as a result. The Government have a plan to fix the situation by 2020, but what more can be done in the meantime to ensure that my constituents can access primary care services?

**Mr Hunt:** There are two things. First, we have succeeded in increasing the number of medical school graduates who go into general practice—a record 3,157 this year.

Secondly—I know this from my conversations with GPs in my hon. Friend’s constituency—we are doing what we can to reinvigorate the partnership model. Since meeting those GPs, I have agreed with the Royal College of General Practitioners and the BMA that we will carry out a formal review of how the partnership model needs to evolve in the modern NHS.

T5. [903800] **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be wholly unacceptable if, as a consequence of creating accountable care organisations, private companies gained control of strategic decisions on local health services?

**Mr Hunt:** I point the hon. Gentleman to what the King’s Fund says, which is that accountable care organisations and integrated care systems make a “massive difference” in care to patients. The King’s Fund is not a pro-Government organisation; it regularly holds the Government to account at election time and throughout the year. Not just the King’s Fund but Polly Toynbee and many other people are saying that.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): It is very positive that Corby clinical commissioning group has announced that core urgent care services will be protected in Corby, along with the announced new GP access and new primary care facilities, but will the Minister join me in keeping a close eye on the CCG as it designs the new access arrangements? People need to be able to access those urgent care services at the right place, at the right time and without delay.

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the funding going into Corby, and it is a tribute to his campaigning as a constituency MP that there is such progress on that measure. I am happy to look at the specific issue. It is important that the CCG continues to consult both Members of Parliament and the public as it takes that work forward.

T6. [903801] **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): GP services are in crisis. Practice after practice is closing, and more GPs leave the service every day. When will the Secretary of State finally listen to the chair of the BMA’s GP committee, who says that current GP funding is “nowhere near enough”?

**Mr Hunt:** We have been listening to the Royal College of General Practitioners and the BMA, which is why last year funding for GPs went up by £314 million and why it will be going up by £2.4 billion over the five-year period, which is a 14% real-terms increase.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** There really is a magnificent array of rosettes on both sides of the Chamber, which today—today only—I will allow to influence me.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): This is a very proud day to be a woman in this House. In mid and south Essex there are plans for a hyper-acute stroke unit at Basildon Hospital. Will the Secretary of State or one of the Ministers confirm that that will be an improvement of services for my constituents in Chelmsford, and not a downgrade?

**Stephen Barclay:** I am very happy to confirm my hon. Friend’s observation. It is absolutely about improving services. This proposal for a new hyper-acute stroke unit in Basildon will ensure there are specialist nurses and doctors available to manage patients at all times, which very much draws on the lessons from London, where we consolidated stroke services and where health outcomes were improved and lives were saved.

T8. [903803] **Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): Valerie and Colin Hindmarch in my constituency were prescribed Primodos at eight-weeks pregnant. Their child, Colin, would have been 50 on 12 February. However, he died at five weeks old with multiple congenital abnormalities. Most of Valerie’s medical records are missing. When will the Secretary of State grant a judge-led public inquiry to get justice for this couple and all the other survivors? Crucially, will he acknowledge that the victims’ trust and confidence can only come through this judge-led public inquiry?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** The hon. Lady will know that we are currently implementing the findings of the expert working group, and we are continuing our discussions with the all-party group to see how much further we can go in answering people’s questions and in responding to these moving cases, one of which she has just explained to the House. Obviously I would be happy to have further discussions with any hon. Member who wants to discuss it with me further.

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): In Shropshire, we have had four years of confusion on the future of our two hospitals. Will the Secretary of State tell the people of Shropshire whether there is Government funding for the proposed reconfiguration of the county’s hospitals?

**Stephen Barclay:** As my hon. Friend will be aware, we announced further funding in the Budget and the autumn statement. On the specifics of Telford, which she has raised on a number of occasions, I am very happy to have further discussions with her.

T9. [903805] **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): In my constituency, Shildon medical centre and half of the Richardson Community Hospital are empty, yet patient services are being cut because the rents charged by NHS Property Services are too high. When will the Secretary of State sort out this waste of resources?

**Stephen Barclay:** I am not aware of the specific case the hon. Lady highlights, but I am happy to look at it and to understand why she feels the rents are disproportionately high. This relates to the point I made earlier in response to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper), which was about the variance in the system and how we ensure that we obtain best value for money. The reality of the debate on health is that the Labour party simply sees it in terms of how much is put in, whereas Conservative Members recognise that we need to both invest more in the NHS and make sure we get the best outcomes. That is the key dividing line between the parties.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): For six years, the people of Redditch have endured a painful consultation on their hospital, the Alex, which has dragged on and on. As a result, they have lost maternity and children’s

emergency services, even though nobody wanted that when they were consulted. People have taken the pain, but when will they get the gain? When will they see the urgent care centre? When will the £29 million be spent on the Alex?

**Stephen Barclay:** There are good plans in place for getting Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust and the Alex, specifically, out of special measures. A package of support is in place to enable the trust to improve its quality of care. Delivery of the acute service redesign plan is a key driver to sustaining services in the medium term and £29.6 million of STP funding has been agreed to support that.

**Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):** At the weekend, NHS England, as my colleagues have pointed out, gave up on the key A&E waiting time target. Does the Minister agree that it is very important that when people go to A&E they do not have to wait longer than four hours, as more than 2.5 million did last year? Whose responsibility is this delivery failure?

**Mr Hunt:** I have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman, but he is saying something that is a big exaggeration. What the NHS has committed to is that by the end of the year coming up more than half of the trusts in the country will meet the A&E target and that we will go back to meeting it across the whole country in the following year. So we are absolutely committed to this target. We recognise there are real pressures, which is why it is going to take time to get back to it, but we will get there.

**Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con):** I congratulate the Secretary of State on securing the £10 billion capital commitment in the Budget at the end of the last year to spend on the NHS. May I take advantage of my position on these Benches to urge him for the next allocation of STP funding to adopt the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) and ensure that the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust gets the Future Fit funding it needs?

**Stephen Barclay:** May I first pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he did in the Department and the high esteem in which he was held by those working in the NHS? On Shrewsbury and Telford, I very much appreciate the importance of the reconfiguration of the trust. We expect a decision shortly on that, although I am not in a position to announce it today.

**Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op):** The Secretary of State will be aware of the huge disruption at the Manchester hospitals this week because of problems with water supplies and a big water leak. He might also be aware that Emmeline Pankhurst's home is on the site of the Manchester hospitals. What conversations has he had with United Utilities and other water companies to ensure that we have safe, constant supplies of water to our hospitals, so that these disruptions do not happen?

**Mr Hunt:** I know that NHS Improvement is aware of that situation and that important conversations are going on to improve the resilience of all our hospitals, including those in Manchester. However, I am happy to write to the hon. Lady on the issue.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** I will call the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) if his question is shorter than his tie.

**Tim Loughton:** Lipoedema affects 10% of women in this country, many without a diagnosis, so why are an increasing number of my constituents saying they cannot get any therapeutic interventions funded by the CCG? Will the Minister meet a delegation of those people and other hon. Members similarly affected?

**Steve Brine:** Yes, of course I will meet my short-tied hon. Friend with the delegation he requests.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** We are well over time, but I do not want the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) to feel isolated or excluded. Let us hear it.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Child suicide calls to Childline are at a record high among girls—it is at 68%. Despite that, the NHS spends only 11% of its budget on mental health issues. Will the Minister indicate what he is going to do to prevent child suicides?

**Mr Hunt:** We are very focused on reducing all suicides. As the hon. Gentleman will know, we have a plan to reduce suicide rates by 10%, and last week we announced a plan to reduce in-patient suicides to zero, which is a big aspiration to which the NHS in England is certainly committed. We are very committed to this agenda.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you, colleagues.

**Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think this appertains to the exchanges we have just had and relates to a ministerial answer. If the Secretary of State would be kind enough to wait a moment to hear it, we would be grateful.

**Emma Hardy:** I seek your advice, Mr Speaker, on something that is very important to my constituents. In my question earlier, I asked about pain infusions and highlighted a letter from consultants saying that the withdrawal of such treatment would increase the risk of mortality. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), had previously agreed by email to meet me and said that he would answer my question today, if I was called to speak, yet a different Minister answered my question and there was no promise to meet. My office called the Department of Health and Social Care and was told that my case was labelled as “no further action”. What steps are available to me, Mr Speaker, to ensure that the Minister sticks to his word and agrees to meet me?

**Mr Speaker:** I think that the explanation of the situation is innocent and that I can probably reassure the hon. Lady. She came in on a question that was being answered by another Minister. On the whole, it is deprecated if Ministers play musical chairs in answer to the same question, even when supplementaries come.

It tends to be expected that one Minister will deal with, to put it bluntly or in the vernacular, the whole caboodle. I think that was why the hon. Lady lost out. However, I just asked the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), who is a very agreeable fellow, whether he stood by his commitment to meet, and he gave a nod of assent.

He is very happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss the matter. They may or may not end up agreeing, but of one thing she can rest assured: there is no conspiracy to exclude her. I hope that the hon. Lady will now go about her business with an additional glint in her eye and spring in her step, confident in the knowledge that she shall shortly meet the hon. Member for Winchester.

## Public Service Delivery: Northamptonshire

12.41 pm

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government what are the implications for public service delivery in Northamptonshire of the issuance by Northamptonshire County Council of a section 114 notice.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak)**: I thank my hon. Friend for his question on a topic that he and his Northamptonshire parliamentary colleagues have consistently raised on behalf of their constituents.

As Members will be aware, on Friday 2 February, Northamptonshire County Council's finance director issued a section 114 notice to stop new spending and put in place a process for the council to meet within a specified time to consider the financial situation. It is important to note that a section 114 notice does not automatically mean that existing services will stop. Northamptonshire's finance director has confirmed that statutory services to safeguard vulnerable people will continue to be delivered and that council staff will continue to be paid.

Local authorities have a legal duty to balance their budget, and section 114 notices are part of the accountability framework that guards against irresponsible financial management. It is for the council to decide what steps it needs to take to balance its budget. I understand that the full council will meet on 22 February to consider the situation.

Local government is, of course, independent of central Government, but, that said, the Government have been aware of concerns about Northamptonshire County Council's finances and governance for some time, which was why the Secretary of State appointed an inspector to undertake an independent best-value inspection on 9 January. That independent inspection is due to report on 16 March, and as the Secretary of State made clear in the written ministerial statement of 9 January, it would be inappropriate for the Government to comment while the inspection is under way, specifically to avoid prejudicing its outcome. The Government will address the wider issue of funding for local government in tomorrow's debate on the local government finance settlement.

Issuing a section 114 notice is a serious step. I understand that this development will be causing some concern in my hon. Friend's constituency and across the county. However, it is also a sign that the council is taking its responsibility seriously. The Secretary of State and I will take a keen interest in the steps that the council takes to resolve these matters and ensure that it continues to deliver for the communities that it serves.

**Mr Hollobone**: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. May I declare an interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council, and may I welcome other Northamptonshire MPs who are also in the Chamber to ask questions?

It gives me no pleasure to say that, with the issue of this section 114 notice, Northamptonshire County Council becomes the worst-run local authority in the country.

There are undoubtedly huge pressures on the social care budget, which are exacerbated by Northamptonshire's fast-growing elderly population. The Government's fairer funding review is welcome, but will, I am afraid, come too late for Northamptonshire County Council. This whole situation has been exacerbated by poor leadership by the cabinet at the county council, in which all seven Northamptonshire MPs now have no confidence. We echo the concerns of September's peer review by the Local Government Association, which concluded that financial information is not presented clearly and transparently and that there is not a sensible budget going forward.

What happens if the county council cannot set a legal budget at its meeting later this month? What will happen to services—statutory or otherwise—to do with adult social services, children's services, schools and highways? The Government have sent in a best-value inspector, which is good, and he is due to report by 16 March. Can—or will—the Secretary of State request of him an urgent interim assessment with some preliminary findings, because I believe that the Government need to be informed?

What is the total debt of the county council? I understand that it owes more than £700 million. Does the section 114 notice have the implication that lending institutions might foreclose on their lending to the authority? Can the Minister assure me that Northamptonshire's bad situation with delayed discharges from our two local hospitals will not be made worse by this section 114 notice? We have a 10% delayed discharge rate. On any one day, 100 people are waiting in the two hospitals. They have completed their treatment, but because Northamptonshire County Council is not getting them into care homes quickly enough, they are not leaving the hospitals. May I urge the inspector to look at the opaque accountancy in the local government shared services model at the county council, which is where a lot of the problems may lie?

Will the Government prevent the county council from selling its new, very recently opened Angel Square offices? While that could bring in £50 million, it could leave a 25-year rental liability for any successor authorities. Will the Minister make sure that the transfer of the fire service out of the county council to the police commissioner is not held up by the financial crisis at the county council? I do not want the fire service to go down with the local authority.

It is clear that Northamptonshire County Council is in a huge mess. We look to the Government inspector to report quickly, and, in the view of all seven Northamptonshire MPs, the sooner that Lords Commissioners are sent in to sort out this mess, the better.

**Rishi Sunak**: I thank my hon. Friend for his questions. I know that this is something that he is thinking about deeply on behalf of his constituents. Let me take in turn the points that he raised. With regard to the fire service, he will hopefully be aware that the Home Office is considering that application and will make its decision in due course. On his points about the financial situation, he is right to say that there are a range of issues that were highlighted in both the independent audit reports and the LGA peer review, which, as he rightly pointed out, cited both culture and governance issues at the council.

On the process from here, Ministers do not have direct contact with the inspector—he is rightly independent—so it is not possible to direct him to report earlier. I would point out that the 16 March deadline means that this inspection will conclude in much less time than was allowed for the Tower Hamlets and Rotherham inspections, which, hopefully, should give my hon. Friend some comfort regarding a rapid resolution.

Finally, if the council meeting is not successful, the finance director has the option of issuing a further section 114 notice. However, it is important to note that he, as the statutory official, has the flexibility today and in the future to authorise any payments that he sees fit and for which there is a sensible case, including, as he has guaranteed, to safeguard vulnerable people. At the point at which the council is ready to make formal representations to my Department for anything that it might require, we stand ready to engage with it.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Mr Speaker, thank you for granting this urgent question. I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box; it is just a pity that it is not the Secretary of State.

There have been deeply troubling reports for a number of months that Northamptonshire County Council has been failing in its duty to the people of Northamptonshire and to the public sector workers who provide valuable services to local people. As has been mentioned, the Local Government Association conducted a financial peer review back in September. That report had three key findings. First, it found that time was “running out for Northamptonshire County Council”.

Secondly, it stated that the council was “heading towards major financial problems”, and, thirdly, it said:

“There was a sense that the scale of the financial challenge for the Council was just too great for it to overcome itself and that the government would have to bail it out.”

Since then, we have had more reports that the council was failing in its duty to the people of Northamptonshire, and residents will now pay the price for its negligence.

The failure of this Tory-run council is the result of a perfect storm of chronic underfunding and catastrophic Tory mismanagement, yet when a Government have taken £5.8 billion out of local government finance, when everyone is saying that social care is on its knees and when children’s services need another £2 billion, not only does the Secretary of State not turn up to reply to an urgent question, but he sticks his head in the sand and fails to give local government the money it needs to provide safe, decent, quality services. This situation shows, yet again, that we cannot push the cost of local government on to council tax payers, because that just does not raise enough money locally. The Secretary of State knows that, the Minister knows that, the Treasury knows that and the local government sector knows that, so when will Ministers stand up to the Chancellor and demand the money that local government needs?

The *Local Government Chronicle* suggests that at least 10 other local authorities are preparing to issue section 114 notices. The sector will look very closely at how the Minister treats Northamptonshire, so what contingency arrangements does he have in place should other authorities fall over the cliff edge? What guarantees can he give from the Dispatch Box that services in Northamptonshire

and across the country will be protected by his Department? Will he join Sally Keeble, Gareth Eales and Beth Miller—Labour’s candidates in Northamptonshire—in calling for the appointment of commissioners to fix this mess?

It was announced last night on Twitter that the Secretary of State was in the process of politically fixing the financial mess he has made for his Tory Back-Bench friends. Two years ago, the transitional grant scheme gave out an additional £3 million of funding, but 80% of that went to Conservative-controlled councils, 70% of which were county councils. By contrast, metropolitan districts got only an extra 2%, despite being the hardest hit. In the light of that, we will be watching the Minister and his Department very carefully, because all councils are financially stretched and all councils deserve fairness.

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming me—albeit lukewarmly—to the Dispatch Box. He talks about the Secretary of State, but it is this Secretary of State who has taken action with regard to Northamptonshire. It was this Secretary of State who, in response to the negative opinions of the external auditors and the LGA peer review, decided to commission an independent inspection at the end of last year. That is exactly what responsible government looks like, and the Secretary of State should be commended for taking swift action.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to prejudge the outcome of the inspection, but it would be absolutely inappropriate and unfair to the council for me to do so. When the Government receive the results of the independent inspection, we will of course carefully consider its findings, but it would be wrong to draw conclusions about those findings today, as he suggests we do.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned finances. We will, of course, be discussing finances tomorrow. This Government have backed local authorities with an historic four-year funding deal that provides more than £200 billion and a real-terms increase in spending for next year and the year after. Everything is always about money for the Labour party, but the hon. Gentleman would do well to listen to the words of the chief executive officer of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, who said:

“Whilst Northamptonshire has had a difficult context within which to balance its budget...other councils in a similar situation have successfully managed their budgets”.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) pointed out, the issue is one of governance and culture. Those are the points that were highlighted and that the inspector will be considering.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) on securing this very important urgent question. As he said, all seven Northamptonshire MPs have lost confidence in the leadership of the county council. There is no question that this is about money; it is about the governance of the county council. Its cabinet has to go, and it has to go now. The vast bulk of county councillors of all political parties on Northamptonshire County Council are impeccable, but there has been a clique running that cabinet, and that is the cause of the problem. If there had been a committee system, this could not have happened. I am not saying that a cabinet system does

[Mr Peter Bone]

not work elsewhere, but we need to ensure that Northamptonshire County Council has a committee system in future. Does the Minister agree?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend makes some intelligent points, and I know that he has represented his constituents well on this issue. I am sure he will understand that I cannot comment on the particular governance arrangements that should be in place at Northamptonshire, but he is right to highlight that governance is important to the conduct of the authority. I am sure that the independent inspector will consider that during his deliberations.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Yesterday, the Communities and Local Government Committee was looking at business rates and local government finance, and we heard from witnesses from the LGA, CIPFA and the County Councils Network. When we asked whether any other councils were in a similar position to Northamptonshire, the answer we got was not this year, but that many councils are on a cliff edge. With the coming pressures on not just adult social care but children's services, some councils could fall over that edge next year without additional resources. These comments were made by Conservatives as well as Labour representatives. Is the Minister aware of other councils that will be in this position next year? If so, what action is he going to take to prevent them from getting into that position?

**Rishi Sunak:** My Department is in constant dialogue with individual councils and the LGA. It funds the LGA with £21 million to conduct peer reviews, so that we can build up a detailed picture of what is happening across local authorities. When there are issues in which we need to be involved, we will of course be involved. We will keep the situation under review.

**Andrew Lewer** (Northampton South) (Con): I declare an interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association and an author of other LGA peer reviews. As a former leader of Derbyshire County Council, I believe that local mismanagement has led to this situation, but I also believe that there are Northamptonshire and sector-wide fairer funding issues to be addressed. Prominent among the funding problems is the huge and growing cost of adult care. Will the Minister consider establishing a royal commission on health and social care, as well as making changes to the funding formula?

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the importance of social care. It was in response to the pressure on social care budgets that this Government announced in last year's spring Budget £2 billion of new funding for social care. We will be discussing that more broadly tomorrow. My hon. Friend is also right to highlight the importance of fair funding. The fair funding consultation opened in December, and I urge all councils to make submissions to the consultation, so that we can start to put in place a new funding formula for local government and ensure that it captures all the cost drivers that councils think are relevant.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): I was in Northampton yesterday for an event celebrating 100 years since some women first got the vote. The Conservative county council's appalling mismanagement of services and finances has left local residents deeply concerned. They want and deserve answers. So what specific guarantees can the Minister give that local services will be protected, particularly for children in need, the elderly, and vulnerable adults?

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Lady is right to highlight constituents' concerns. Of course they are concerned about what they are seeing. That is why I am glad to be able to reassure them that the statutory financial officer at Northamptonshire County Council has said that he will maintain all funding for statutory safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults, and that he has the flexibility to take any steps and approve any payment that he sees fit to deliver exactly that objective.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): As ever, I could not have put it better than my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), not least because all seven Northamptonshire MPs were told by cabinet members before Christmas that Northamptonshire County Council would be able to balance its books. May I press my hon. Friend again on the point about the inspector being invited to make an interim recommendation? That would be very welcome because it would help to give some much-needed reassurance to my constituents.

**Rishi Sunak:** I appreciate where my hon. Friend is coming from, but I have to remind him that the inspector is independent of the Government and does not communicate directly with Ministers during this process. He has been asked to report back by 16 March, which is a considerably shorter timeframe than previous inspections, and he has the option to report back as soon as he feels that he has been able to complete his work properly and objectively.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): It is of course completely untrue that councils are independent. Most council funding comes from central Government, as we all know. Has the Minister considered the potential merit of creating new council tax bands, especially on high-value properties, as that would make council tax fairer and create extra revenue? Again, however, this is not a decision that councils can take unilaterally—it has to be taken by central Government.

**Rishi Sunak:** That is not something I am actively considering, having only been in the job for a couple of weeks. On the hon. Lady's broader point about council tax, the Government have increased the council tax referendum limit by 1% for the forthcoming years to allow councils to raise additional funds should they see fit.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Northamptonshire has very close links with Oxfordshire at a whole number of different local government levels. Can the Minister reassure me that this crisis in Northamptonshire will not affect the deals that Northamptonshire has with Oxfordshire and the people of Oxfordshire?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend, as a former councillor himself, will be very familiar with these issues. Obviously, the details of individual contracts will be a matter for

the individual officer concerned, but nothing in the inspection process itself should change any of those contracts as of today.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister boasts of a settlement given to local government. Northamptonshire's accounts show that in the next five years it will owe £240 million to private finance initiative schemes, of which £77 million is interest alone, paid to shareholders. Does he therefore agree that it is time for a windfall tax on the excessive profits of these companies, so that we can put the money where it is needed—in our public services, not in the pockets of these legal loan sharks?

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Lady talks about funding for Northamptonshire. Let me tell the House the numbers. Northamptonshire will be receiving a £30 million increase in core spending power for the forthcoming year. That represents an over-3% increase in its total budget, comparing favourably with the national average of 1.5%. On top of that, Northamptonshire will have access to its business rates retention, which on its current trajectory will include another £4 million of additional resources available.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Since 2010, there have been multiple requests from Liverpool's leader and MPs inviting Ministers to come and look at our local authority finances. We have even sent train tickets to a previous Secretary of State that have gone to waste. Will the Minister now accept the request and come to see for himself the severe financial strain that Liverpool is experiencing, along with many other councils across the country?

**Mr Speaker:** In particular, Northamptonshire.

**Rishi Sunak:** I would be delighted to visit Liverpool on the hon. Lady's invitation. I was just being briefed by my officials on the good work that her council is doing on the troubled families programme, particularly with vulnerable children. I would be delighted to accept her invitation and meet people in Liverpool in due course.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Northamptonshire County Council has completely failed its citizens and its staff. Northamptonshire MPs have

consistently voted for huge cuts to local government funding, and Ministers have refused to listen when Labour Members described the impacts of rising demand for services and even deeper cuts to our councils. When will the Minister listen and respond to the budget crisis facing all councils, including my own City of Nottingham Council?

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Lady asks "When?" The answer is tomorrow, when we will be debating the local government finance settlement, where councils will see a real-terms increase in their core spending power this year. As I have said, Northamptonshire itself will be receiving at least a 3% increase in its core spending power next year.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): The Minister did not answer the question from the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). How many local authorities is he talking to that have concerns about their funding next year?

**Rishi Sunak:** It would be wholly inappropriate for me to give a running commentary on councils that we might have a conversation with. As I told the Chair of the Select Committee, my Department consistently monitors all councils and is in dialogue with all of them—as well as the LGA's peer review process, which we fund—to ensure that we have a good, consistent picture across local government of what is happening on the ground.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): On 19 December, I extracted a commitment from the Secretary of State, who is not in his place, that the transition grant was finished. As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) said, that grant overwhelmingly went to better-off communities and those with Conservative administrations. Can the Minister assure me that in the light of the calls overnight, following the section 114 notice, for the transition grant to be reinstated, it will not be reinstated?

**Rishi Sunak:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the written statement will be laid later today. We will be debating these issues tomorrow, and he will have the answers to all his questions then.

## Women's Suffrage Centenary

1.6 pm

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Amber Rudd):** I ask you, Mr Speaker, and right hon. and hon. Members to look up—to look up and remember that before 1834, women could only watch proceedings in this House through a ventilation shaft right in the middle of the ceiling.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** Not this ceiling!

**Amber Rudd:** Thank you. It is so useful to be corrected by helpful gentlemen here.

After this palace was rebuilt because of the great fire of 1834, things improved, but not much. There was now a Ladies Gallery above the Speaker's Chair, but it was high up and there was a row of heavy grilles covering the glass. That was deliberate: it was there to stop the MPs from seeing the women because it was thought that they might distract them. In the Ladies Gallery, you could not see properly, you could not hear properly, and it was hot and uncomfortable. Leading suffragist Millicent Fawcett described the Ladies Gallery as

“a grand place for getting headaches”

and said that it was like wearing a giant pair of spectacles that were not designed properly because it was so difficult to see through the grilles. The grilles were both a physical and metaphorical symbol of women's absolute exclusion from Parliament in the 19th century, so it was no surprise that they became a target during the suffragette movement, with women tying themselves to them in protest.

All around Parliament, we can see the marks of the long and arduous struggle for women to win the right to vote and to be heard in Parliament. There is the plate in the crypt chapel that marks the place where suffragette Emily Wilding Davison hid on census night; there is the damaged statue of Viscount Falkland—damaged because a suffragette handcuffed herself to it and was forcibly removed; and the hated grilles are still preserved in Central Lobby.

The fight for women to have a voice and a vote was long and hard, both inside and outside Parliament. Suffragettes were brutally force-fed with tubes: a process so painful that it could cause lifelong injuries and make even the prison wardens cry in horror. Those who dared march in favour of women's rights were pelted with rotting vegetables, dead rats, rocks and cowpats.

But the struggle was worth it, because on this day 100 years ago an important law was passed that changed the UK forever. On this day a century ago, the Representation of the People Act was passed in Parliament, allowing some women—those over the age of 30, with property—to vote for the very first time. In fact, it was the Home Secretary at the time, Sir George Cave, who was the main sponsor of the Representation of the People Bill, which became the famous 1918 Act. It was also the Home Secretary who moved the crucial clause, clause 4, on franchises for women.

Although women did not get full voting rights until 1928, when a Conservative Government passed the Equal Franchise Act, what happened in 1918 was a major step in the right direction. That February vote

paved the way for women to make huge strides forward in politics and in many other spheres of life. That is why it is so important that the determination of the women who fought for our democratic rights is never forgotten.

To help do that, the Government are celebrating this milestone with a special £5 million fund. In November, we announced that £1.2 million of that money is going directly to seven centenary cities and towns in England with a strong suffrage history. Bolton, Bristol, Leeds, Leicester, London, Manchester and Nottingham will use that money to strengthen the reach and legacy of the centenary and help inspire a new generation with this story. Leicester unveiled the statue of its local suffragette hero, Alice Hawkins, on Sunday.

In December, we opened the small grant scheme so that local groups could bid for money to pay for local events to celebrate the anniversary. Today, I am pleased to announce that the large grant scheme is now open, so that local community groups can bid for even bigger projects worth up to £125,000. The rest of the £5 million fund will be used to pay for activities to raise awareness of the importance of democracy for young people, as well as to erect a statue of leading suffragist Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square. Money will also go to projects specifically designed to increase the number of women in political office, including piloting a programme to inspire young women with opportunities to be leaders in their communities.

The centenary is also a great opportunity to take stock and celebrate all that we have achieved as women. I am proud to be part of the most diverse House of Commons in British history. We have our second female Prime Minister. A third of those attending Cabinet are women, and we have the highest ever number of female MPs. Outside politics, we have seen so much progress since 1918. More women are in a more diverse range of jobs than ever before and are increasingly at the top of their fields.

But let us not fool ourselves that true equality is a done deal. It is something we must all continue to work for. We know that women still face barriers. The gender pay gap and sexual harassment must be addressed. Women are still more likely to take on the bulk of childcare responsibilities. Only 4% of chief executives of FTSE companies are women, and I am certain that we are more likely to be sitting next to a man than a woman on these Benches—perhaps not during this statement, but generally.

Those of us who have our place here face vile sexist abuse. We have seen a concerted effort both online and offline to destroy the confidence of women who want to be involved in political life. Just last week, we learnt that the Labour leader of Haringey Council had quit over what she called “bullying” and “sexism” by supporters of Jeremy Corbyn. The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) receives endless horrible abuse. In fact, she has disgracefully received over half of all the online abuse sent to female politicians. As she has said, it is the sheer volume of hatred that makes it so debilitating, so corrosive and so upsetting. In my constituency of Hastings and Rye, I am often asked by people who come up to me, “How can you bear it—the hate?” I bear it, like other women in this Chamber do, because I know that female voices matter in politics and in life.

But we should not have to bear it. We need to call this sort of behaviour out and make it clear that enough is enough. I know, like the suffragettes and suffragists did, that this House is for everybody, and I hope we can welcome even more women here in the future. I commend this statement to the House.

1.14 pm

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): I would like to thank the Minister for sight of her statement. Unfortunately, I have not really had time to read it as it was given to me so late—not very sisterly, but never mind.

I was hoping that the Minister was going to make an announcement today that the Government were going to issue an official apology to the women of the suffragette movement or maybe a pardon for those who were wrongly imprisoned and sexually assaulted in their battle to get women the vote. Instead, all we have is another announcement—how utterly disappointing.

The Minister is right: 2018 marks the landmark centenary of when some women received the right to vote. That was also the day when men, wanting to cement their authority and majority, decided to give working-class men the vote, so the men in my office are also celebrating today. Working-class women, socialists, trade unionists and black, Asian and minority ethnic women were still denied a voice.

Labour is the party of equality, with a proud record of advancing women's rights. We are so proud of our achievements and ashamed of the Tory party's determination to undo and remove safeguards for women. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] Let me explain. Section 40 of the Equality Act 2010 had a safeguard for women and employees who might be sexually harassed or abused by third parties, as we saw in the Presidents Club, but unfortunately the coalition Government removed that section in 2013. I hope the Government will reinstate it. Almost every piece of legislation that has improved the lives of women has been introduced by a Labour Government.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): That is not true.

**Dawn Butler**: I am afraid it is true. I do not want to get into, "Our one's bigger than your one," but Labour has more female MPs than all the political parties put together. This Government talk about their commitment to equality, but in reality, the only thing they are committed to is making announcements without action.

It is true that the entire process of the grants has been shambolic. The Government announced a women's centenary fund. They took nine months to officially launch it and gave women's groups just four days to submit an online application for funding if they wanted to be in time to celebrate today's date. The Government talk about their commitment to equality, but as I said, they are just making another announcement.

This was supposed to be a momentous opportunity for the country to come together and celebrate the achievements made over the last 100 years of some women gaining the vote, but instead, the Government have outsourced yet another contract that has fallen woefully short of achieving its intended purpose. Labour will be pressing the Government for answers on the allocation of these funds. I am glad that the Minister gave some details today about where the funds have gone, but only 4% of them have been allocated.

This year must be the year that women's voices are fully heard in politics. This year, the Labour party will be celebrating the centenary for the whole year. I am really pleased that the House authorities have named the exhibition in the Houses of Parliament after me—"New Dawn"—so my name will live forever in this place.

I urge—[*Interruption.*] I urge the Minister and all the Members heckling me from a sedentary position to take a moment on this day and in this year, marking the centenary and the 10 years until all women received the right to vote, to take a moment to think about the Government's policies and the damage they are doing to women, with 86% of the cuts falling on the shoulders of women. Please take a moment to think about the structural barriers and the privilege that we have to undo. Please take that moment in this year.

**Amber Rudd**: May I start by thanking you, Mr Speaker, for the work that has been done throughout Parliament on the Vote 100 celebrations?

I know that this is something that involves everybody, and I must say I am slightly disappointed at the tone of the hon. Lady's approach. I think it is great to see so many women active in Parliament, and I wish she could perhaps be a little bit more celebratory about that today. In fact, this Government are committed to making sure that we deliver for women, such as the highest level of employment for women and the tax cuts to the personal allowance, which have been so helpful to women.

Instead of making a great list, I just want to challenge the hon. Lady on one element of my statement that she did not engage with, but which I think was the most important element: what are we going to do about stopping the hate towards women? If we want more women to enter politics—we want more women councillors, more women MPs—we must take action to stop the level of hate coming at women. A lot of it comes from Momentum. We have seen that—[*Interruption.*] I am not saying that it only comes to Conservatives. I say to the hon. Lady that I know it comes to Labour MPs as much as it does to Conservative MPs. Momentum is not selective in who it abuses.

It is incredibly important that we all call this out. If we listened to Claire Kober's comments over the weekend, she was explicit about where the abuse had come from and about the sexism that had come to her. It is incredibly important that we work together on this to make sure that it does not happen. Today, let us look ahead to this year of celebrations and to all the work we can do to encourage more women to come forward and not be put off by the hate directed to them.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is a privilege to have served in this House for nearly 26 years now. Every day, as I take my seat on this Bench, I look across at the memorial to Jo Cox on the other side of the Chamber, and I remember that there is a huge capacity in this House to work cross-party and to bring about positive change, which we all want to do. I am therefore very pleased that the Minister has come to the Dispatch Box to make a statement on such an auspicious day, particularly to pay tribute to the people who gave us the equal suffrage that we now enjoy.

As we take stock, however, we must not forget that women are still under-represented in this place and in other fields—such as science and engineering, and the

[*Dame Cheryl Gillan*]

top levels of business—and that women still do not get equal pay for equal work. Much of the stereotyping of male and female roles begins in the classroom. What message will my right hon. Friend send to teachers today to ensure real equality of opportunity and aspiration for all our students in the future, irrespective of gender?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my right hon. Friend for her comments. She is herself such an inspiration for many women coming into Parliament, who can see her extraordinary achievements. In answer to her question, a pack is going to be made available for teachers in schools to build on the celebrations that we are having here and to make girls in schools aware of the changes that have taken place over the 100 years.

I also say to teachers in schools that I know they want what we want, which is more equality of opportunity for girls as they go into the workplace. One thing we need to be better at is encouraging more girls to go into STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths. At the moment, only 30% of STEM subjects at A-level are taken by women. We need to do better at that and encourage them to get more involved in STEM subjects, so that they have more opportunities in adult life.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am very proud to be able to respond to the statement on behalf of my party, the Scottish National party, following in the footsteps of inspirational women such as Winnie Ewing, Margo MacDonald and our own First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon. She has shown her commitment with a 50:50 gender-balanced Cabinet, and she has today made a commitment to encourage more women to come in behind us, as women in politics, with a £500,000 fund to encourage women into public life at all levels in Scotland, where they are so desperately needed.

In this House that man built, suffragists and suffragettes gave us our place. We have a voice, but we do not yet have equality. A woman called Carolyn in Glasgow reflected on Twitter today:

“No right will persist if it is not protected.”

We have a duty to protect the rights of women in the work we do.

I do not wish to be party political, but I would be doing a disservice to suffragettes who stood up for their causes, which were about more than just winning the vote for women, if I did not say that we still have a Government who pursue policies such as the rape clause and social security cuts that hit women's budgets—85% of the cuts have come out of women's pockets—and that we have yet to see justice for the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaigners. We also have yet to see the work on the Istanbul convention begun by my colleague Eilidh Whiteford, the first SNP woman to get legislation passed in this place, brought fully into force.

Across the country today and in this building, children are learning about the work of the suffragettes, and primary 4/5 of St Albert's Primary School are learning why women fought to get their rights. May I ask the Minister to encourage other schools right across the country to take up opportunities to learn more about that battle, including by going to organisations such as the Glasgow women's library and the Mitchell library in Glasgow, which holds the mugshots of suffragettes

arrested and jailed in Glasgow? Today, the suffragette flag is flying over the former Calton jail in Edinburgh, where women were held and force-fed.

We reflect today on how far we have come, yet we also reflect on how far we have to travel. I see many people in the suffragette colours, which are purple for dignity, white for purity and green for hope—and I am wearing green for hope.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Lady for her response. We share a view about wanting to make sure that the history of the suffrage movement is well understood. The new generation of girls needs to understand why it was so hard-fought and why it is therefore so important for them to participate in the vote.

The hon. Lady asked specifically about the legislation we are bringing forward to do more to protect women. I gently say to her that the Government are very focused on making sure that we continue to do so both in the positive—making sure that we have a better approach to the gender pay gap—and in protecting women. That is why we are bringing forward this year a domestic abuse Bill, which will address the issue of the Istanbul convention.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): It is right that we celebrate today, and most of us would want to recognise what we have achieved working together, often cross-party, to improve the lot of women in this country. I particularly want to pay tribute to all the people who have served on the Women and Equalities Committee for the incredible work we have done together to try to improve things for women in our country.

It is our role in the Commons to scrutinise laws and to make sure that we have a healthy democracy. Allowing women the right to stand for election to this place and giving them the vote gave us a healthier democracy 100 years ago, and we need to make sure we build on that in the future to have more women in this place and ensure a healthier democracy in years to come.

My right hon. Friend was right not to forget the abuse and intimidation that the suffragettes endured from their opposition 100 years ago. It is the sort of abuse that too many women who stand for public office still have to endure today. What can my right hon. Friend tell us about the work the Government will be doing to tackle the online abuse that is so clearly putting women off standing for election and, in doing so, to make sure that in the future we can have a 50:50 Parliament that properly represents this country?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my right hon. Friend, who has done so much herself to promote the cause of equality in Parliament as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee. I share her view that we need to do more to stop the online abuse that is really damaging the self-confidence of so many women and reducing the likelihood that they will get involved in politics.

One of the things we have announced is that we have asked the Law Commission to look at the legislation to ensure that what we constantly say here is actually the case—namely, that things that are illegal offline are also illegal online. Is that being taken forward, and is the legislation in place to deliver on that? We are going to make sure that that is the case, and if necessary we will come back to the Chamber with proposals.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Thirty-five years, three months and nine days after the Peckham by-election, which sent her to this place, I call Harriet Harman.

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I commend the right hon. Lady for her assertion that although as women, inside and outside the House, we have made tremendous progress, we still have so much further to go?

May I also say that I fully support the Government's move to ask the Law Commission to consider the case for making it an offence to threaten and abuse parliamentary candidates? This is about misogynists seeking to silence women who dare to speak out—it is particularly virulent against younger women and black women. Voters have the right to choose whoever they want, man or woman, to represent them, and once that representative is elected to Parliament it is their right and duty to be able to get on with the job without being subjected to intimidation, threats or violence. This is about our democracy, so I hope Members in all parts of the House will give it their full support.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for her comments, and I am full of admiration for the work that she did in government to promote the role and the importance of women's working lives. That goes absolutely to the core of the argument for wanting more women MPs and more women in government, because only then do we get government's application to and attention on the improvements that need to take place. I thank her for her support in this area and I completely share her view—this is an attack on women; it is a sexist attack. We have seen an escalation of it over the past few years. It is not good enough for people to say, as some do, "You're in politics. You must accept it." We do not accept it. We will take action to stop it, and we will push for cultural change.

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): I think we all want to celebrate how important this day is. It is 100 years since women first got the vote. My message to any young woman or girl watching this is, "Go for it!" This is an amazing place to be able to speak up for your community, and we want a Parliament that is hugely diverse.

Does my right hon. Friend agree not only that we should pay huge tribute to wonderful organisations such as the Girl Guides, which play their role in inspiring a brand new generation of girls to get involved, but that there is work to be done, which we all need to do, in inspiring men and boys to become part of a campaign on gender equality in the next 100 years, when perhaps they did not play as much of a role during the past 100 years?

**Amber Rudd:** Yes, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I share her approach to encouraging young women to get involved. They should indeed go for it. And yes, third-party organisations such as the Girl Guides and the Scouts play an important role in giving women the confidence to be able to find their own voices. Of course, men play an important part as well in helping us change the law and helping change attitudes,

so that the sort of abuse that women have received, often from men, becomes culturally unacceptable. We need their help for that.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Today, the Home Affairs Committee will take evidence from the Fawcett Society on how we tackle misogyny and hate crime today. Does the right hon. Lady agree that, given that we all stand on the shoulders of our mothers, our grandmothers and our great-grandmothers who fought for so many women to have their voices heard, the best tribute that we can pay to all those women who fought for us is to fight ourselves for women's equality for our daughters and for our granddaughters in future, and to make sure that our sons and grandsons count themselves as feminists, too?

**Amber Rudd:** I agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Lady. We must not sit back on our laurels and think that it has all been achieved. We need to keep on making the point and ensure, as she rightly says, that the next generation understands that and that equality matters to men as much as it matters to women.

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement and answer her call that men should join the fight to secure women's rights? May I ask her to do one small thing? I draw her attention to early-day motion 866, which has been signed by many right hon. and hon. Members, not least men from this side of the House. It asks the Government to implement section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which would require political parties to publish the gender balance of their candidate lists. It might not be very conducive for this party to publish its lists, but that would encourage us to select more women as candidates to take their role in public life.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. He, of course, has played an important role in encouraging women to get involved in Parliament. We are always grateful for the additional support of men, which is such an important part of this. I will take a careful look at what he suggests.

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): A hundred years on from the first women winning the chance to vote, power in our society is still predominantly and disproportionately in the hands of men. We are a long way from equal power. Government and legislation have an important role to play, but there is also a wider task for all of us to unpick the sexism and the gendered assumptions that are woven right through our culture. Does the Minister agree that the best way to honour the spirit of the suffragettes is for everyone, regardless of gender, to take action in their everyday life to promote gender equality?

**Amber Rudd:** I wholly agree with the hon. Lady. It is interesting where one can see sexism, which can surprise one. I sometimes go to meetings and find that there are not any women there. All of us should have a responsibility for calling that out and saying to people who might be hosting a meeting or chairing an event, "That's not good enough. Where are the women?" Of course, that gives one an opportunity to step up and take a role, but most importantly, it makes sure that there are fewer all-male events. We need to call it out wherever we see it.

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): My young constituent Grace Tucker, aged 6, is in the Gallery today. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must all take responsibility for bringing on and inspiring the next generation?

**Amber Rudd:** I certainly do. We need to ensure that all girls and young women realise that they, too, have the opportunity to sit here and represent their constituency. What an honour it is when we get that opportunity.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): May I join the Minister in calling out controlling and misogynistic language—trying to shout women down in public life? We must learn the lesson that the suffragettes taught all of us: it is deeds, not words, that we are here to give. Will she join those of us calling out the Sierra Leonean politicians using female genital mutilation as an election pledge and standing with the women whose voices can no longer be heard, such as Michelle Samaraweera, whose rapist and murderer still sits free in India despite the Government asking for his extradition eight years ago? Madeleine Albright told us that there was a special place in hell for women who do not help other women. Let us use our platform to speak for women who cannot yet speak out and show the difference it makes.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising that point, and I completely share her view. This Government, with cross-party support, have done much to ensure that we address female genital mutilation in this country and that, where we think girls are being taken abroad, the Border Force is trained to make sure that it looks after this issue. But there is no room to stop on that sort of action and I share her view. The idea of using female genital mutilation as an election pledge is just disgusting and disgraceful.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): May I add my support to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) in urging the Minister to look at section 106 of the Equality Act? When the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) was taking the Act through the House, she drafted that clause in a cross-party manner; I worked with her when I was the shadow Minister. There is nothing in the clause that we should be afraid of. We have seen from the BBC that transparency and publishing information help to make change, and although we have made progress on this side of the House, we know we can go further. I urge my right hon. Friend to look seriously at the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my right hon. Friend for the point, which he makes so eloquently. I also congratulate him on his new role as co-chair of Women2Win. I know he will play an important part in ensuring that we get more women into Parliament. As I have said, I will certainly take a look at the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin).

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I should just note for colleagues that the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), when he was Government Chief Whip, responded favourably and quickly to a request from me and others

to establish the Women and Equalities Committee. His role in that matter ought to be acknowledged and respected.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): He's a feminist.

**Mr Speaker:** Steady.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): I was honoured in Leicester on Sunday to help unveil the statue to the suffragette Alice Hawkins. Alice was a shoe factory worker who fought all her life for equality and liberty, including infamously digging up Leicester golf club with the message,

“No votes for women, no golf for men.”

On a more serious note, Alice knew, as we all know, that the fight for equality never ends. Does the Home Secretary agree that one of the next big battles is to ensure that the increasing number of women who care for elderly relatives are treated fairly in work and get the support they need, because this will happen to all of us as we live for longer? For those women to have equality, we need better support, better social care and more flexibility in the workplace.

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady is right that the main carer for elderly people—often it is our parents—tends to be a woman, just as it does for children. One thing that we hope to achieve culturally, rather than through legislation, is to share that responsibility more equally. Certainly she is right that the Government need to give considerable support to the women who do so much of the caring.

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Emily Davison was a child of Northumberland and is buried in Morpeth, 6 miles from where I live. The town is in full bunting celebration this week to remember her and her bravery in stepping out, because she felt she had no other way to be heard, to try to reach the King on Epsom racecourse, where she lost her life.

The challenge is that bravery is still required to stand as a female politician. Too many people say to me, “Gosh, you're very brave to be in politics.” I do not feel brave. Mostly, I feel very loud and noisy: I have stuff to say, I want to say it and I have this extraordinary place in which to share my beliefs. Can the Home Secretary give us confidence that we will get the police force and the Crown Prosecution Service to work more effectively to protect us and all those who follow us in politics from attacks? I have received personal attacks that have not been followed up, whereas colleagues have found police forces in other parts of the country more effective.

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope it is taken as a central theme of the message I am putting out today that we will do more to ensure that women who participate in elections are protected. The Law Commission is reviewing whether there is a parity of approach to offline and online offences, as we believe should be the case. If an additional piece of law is needed to ensure that electoral candidates get additional protection, we will put one in place. I will review what my hon. Friend has said to see if there is any additional help I can give her.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Even in this Brexit-free week, the Government have chosen to bring forward Bills about smart meters and space technology, while the gender-based violence legislation has been postponed time and again. A century ago, Parliament managed to cope with a world war and the women's suffrage legislation at one and the same time. When will the Government stop procrastinating and deliver on their duty to improve women's lives?

**Amber Rudd:** I do not recognise the hon. Lady's criticism. We are bringing forward a domestic abuse Bill this year and will embark on a consultation shortly. We want to engage, as I have been doing, with stakeholders and Members of Parliament, including Opposition Members, to ensure that we include what really matters to them. Protecting women and their lives is central to what we do.

**Helen Whatley** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): My youngest daughter recently asked her father, "Daddy, can men become Members of Parliament too?" but I suspect that she is a little bit unusual. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must use the opportunity of the centenary to encourage more women to stand for election and to overcome their fears of being in the public eye, because of the good they could do as an MP or a local councillor? In almost any elected role, one has the opportunity to give people a voice and make lives better.

**Amber Rudd:** I reassure my hon. Friend that as part of the celebrations this year, we are focused on encouraging more young women to get involved in politics and, potentially, to become Members of Parliament. The Cabinet Office has an education pack that it will be putting out to schools. As I said in my statement, we are also commissioning organisations to engage across the country with young women to make them aware of the opportunities they have to represent their constituency in this place.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): There is nobody more partisan than I am, but today is no time to be partisan. It is a time to be proud that we are all lucky enough to be in this place on such an auspicious day, when we welcome and celebrate 100 years of women's enfranchisement. When I first came here, there were only 60 women MPs and today we celebrate comprising nearly a third of all Members, but it is still not enough.

While we do not have the representation we want here, there is also an issue outside this place for the women who form 51% of the population: enforcement of the laws to protect them is very bad, particularly in the employment sphere. Will the Home Secretary take this opportunity to say how we can improve the enforcement of employment law to ensure that all women in every workplace up and down this country are properly protected?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising not only women in Parliament, which is central to what we are discussing today, but the additional subject of women outside Parliament and ensuring that they have the access to top jobs and the full opportunities that men have. The Taylor review contained many recommendations, the vast majority of which we are taking forward. We now have a director of labour market enforcement to

co-ordinate the different groups and ensure that there is no abuse of the labour market. We will always take working lives very seriously to ensure that there is no breach of the legislation.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that Sussex is leading the way in having great women in politics, with our wonderful Home Secretary, our first female Muslim Minister who spoke at the Dispatch Box a few weeks ago, a female chief executive officer of East Sussex County Council, a female leader of West Sussex County Council and Katy Bourne, the Sussex police and crime commissioner. Does she agree that to replicate that success across the country, we need to work together across the parties not just to celebrate our achievements so far, but to make sure that we are doing more for women in politics?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. She is an extraordinary woman in her own right. Not only is she a Member of Parliament; she is one of those wonderful Macmillan night nurses that we all know so well. She is an extraordinary role model and I hope that her presence here will encourage other women to come forward.

**Mr Speaker:** I am pleased to see that the constituent of the hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), the six-year-old Grace Tucker, has very sensibly promoted herself from the third row to the front row. That, I think, will be widely welcomed.

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Just over 20 years ago when I was first elected to this place, I was only the 209th woman ever to be elected to the House of Commons. We have 208 women in this Parliament, so that is an advance, but we do not have 325. We have more to do. In that regard, will the Home Secretary commend the efforts of our trade unions, which spend their time enabling women to organise, improve their confidence and take part in public life, in a way that makes them much more likely to go on to seek to represent others in their communities in our councils and in this place?

**Amber Rudd:** Yes, I will. Any route that helps women to get involved is incredibly important. One does not have to agree with another woman to admire how she engages and succeeds in her role. I think, in particular, of Frances O'Grady.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Chelmsford was the birthplace of Anne Knight, who wrote the first ever pamphlet on women's suffrage. I wonder what she would think of how easy it is today to publish our views online. I think that she would congratulate everyone who has spoken today about the need to be more careful about what we say on social media and online.

I am incredibly proud to be here after 100 years of women having the vote. The Government have designated this year the year of engineering, and next year is the 100th birthday of the Women's Engineering Society. Do the Home Secretary and all the women here agree that the fusion of all those anniversaries presents an excellent opportunity to encourage more women into engineering, as well as politics, and for everyone to step up to that challenge?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need to make sure that more women get involved in engineering as part of widening their opportunities. While she is thinking of additional landmark anniversaries or celebrations, I point out that today is Safer Internet Day, which is a reminder of how important it is for positive things to be published and circulated online, and of how we have to be so vigilant to make sure that we are not put off coming into Parliament by the online negativity that sometimes takes place.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am delighted that we are celebrating 100 years since some women first got the vote, but now is the time to go further and ensure that all votes count equally by introducing a fairer voting system. It is not an accident that every democracy with more than 40% women legislators uses some form of proportional representation. Does the Home Secretary agree that a fitting tribute to the suffragettes would be to replace our archaic and undemocratic electoral system with one that ensures that every vote genuinely counts equally?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Lady, but I cannot share her view. We had a referendum on that not so long ago, and my view is that the public have had enough of referendums for now.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I make the very simple point that with one third of women and one third of men not voting at general elections, and two thirds of women and two thirds of men—perhaps more—not voting in local elections, the best and easiest way to celebrate the centenary of women's suffrage is for everyone to go out and vote whenever an election is called.

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend makes a characteristically logical point. We can all do more to champion the cause of voting when it comes around, and like most Members of Parliament, I am out there, up and down the streets in my constituency, encouraging people to do so.

**Thangam Debonnaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): It is my belief that every one of us women MPs was encouraged by other women who wanted us to make this place loud and feel more like the world we live in. I was particularly encouraged by my grandmother, Florence Parker, a stalwart of the Co-operative Women's Guild, who campaigned so hard for women's suffrage. I thank the Home Secretary for mentioning Bristol's role in the suffrage campaign. Will she join me in congratulating the Co-operative Women's Guild on its role in achieving women's suffrage?

**Amber Rudd:** Yes, I am delighted to join the hon. Lady in adding my congratulations to the Co-operative Women's Guild.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): One hundred years on from gaining the vote, too many girls and women still have to struggle too hard to reach their potential and for equality. What the change showed 100 years ago is that sometimes the law is required for real equality. Will the Minister follow the example of Iceland and make it illegal to pay men more than women?

**Amber Rudd:** Under the Equal Pay Act 1970, it is illegal to pay men more than women for the same work. We are focused now on making sure that we make more progress on the gender pay gap, which is why we have introduced legislation requiring all companies with more than 250 employees to publish their gender gap by 4 April. After that, we will work with them to make sure that they take action to close it.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I am proud to be one of those making what the Home Secretary described as the most diverse Parliament ever. I am not only one of the one third who are women, but one of the 7.8% who are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. My maternal grandmother was illiterate; her passport had a thumbprint in it because she could not write her own name. Does the Home Secretary agree that on a day like today, it is not enough simply to pat ourselves on the back? We could do better not only on women, but on BME, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, disability, and all those things—some people may even inhabit more than one of those categories at once.

**Amber Rudd:** Yes, I agree with the hon. Lady. We can talk today, as we should, about making sure that we encourage more women into Parliament and ensuring that there is more opportunity for women, but there is a wider issue of equality. I hope that thinking about women in this way today will encourage us all to think about it more diversely as well.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): It is a delight to be able to celebrate the 100 years today, but would it not be a terrible mistake if we showed any sense of complacency? After all, so often in the history of these matters, we took one step forward and two steps back. In 1739, women could vote for sextons and local government officials. In 1843, Grace Brown—she was a butcher in Lichfield, by the way—and 30 women voted in an election. In 1867, Lily Maxwell voted in a parliamentary by-election, but then in 1871, the men said, “No, you can't vote anymore,” and expressly refused to allow them the vote, until it came in properly in the 20th century. Do we not need to make sure that every single man in Parliament is a proper honorary sister?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, who is such an outstanding advocate for equality. That was a great history lesson on the forwards and backwards of women's rights. I wholly agree with the central principle of his point. This is no time for complacency. I particularly feel—I sense that the rest of right hon. and hon. Members here share this feeling—that we all need to do more to stop the attacks on women who stand for election; and yes, we need the men in this Parliament to stand beside us and call it out.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): I am sorry that I was a little late, Mr Speaker, but I had something else that I could not avoid. However, I am so delighted to be able to celebrate this centenary. As some may know, men also played a major part in ensuring that the vote was given to women. In the late 1860s, Jacob Bright, with Richard Pankhurst, brought forward the first Bill to give women total female suffrage, and I believe that that tradition can be continued. For example, I pay tribute

to my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) for her help in getting my Bill, which is now the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014, through to protect women. We men are behind everything that you have said.

**Mr Speaker:** I was not intending to draw attention to the fact that the hon. Gentleman was three quarters of an hour late, but unfortunately, he has done so for me.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for his comment. He brought forward that Bill on gender equality internationally. It was a very important Bill internationally for helping women, and he is right: we need men to participate to ensure that we not only protect women's rights, but make progress with them.

**Mr Speaker:** An exceptional occasion can allow for exceptional measures.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I echo the many calls to encourage more women to enter politics. Until we have council chambers and a Parliament that truly reflect the rich diversity of British society, including gender balance, we will be doing a disservice to the next generation. Will the Home Secretary join me in commending the excellent work of the Labour Women's Network and the Fabian Women's Network, whose sisterly support, training and mentoring schemes have led, and are leading, to many women entering public life?

**Amber Rudd:** It is interesting that we have cross-party initiatives to encourage women and also ones in our own parties. We have Women2Win and, as the hon. Lady said, Labour has the Labour Women's Network. Of course, I commend them and encourage them; we need more women on both sides.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): With no working Northern Ireland Assembly, we have no outlet for celebrations for this great event. Would the Minister undertake to contact the permanent secretary in the Department for Communities of the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that Northern Ireland has a part to play in this wonderful and incredibly important celebration?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing that to my attention. I will certainly take up his proposal and ensure that there is an appropriate celebration this year in Northern Ireland as well.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I welcome the funding that Nottingham has received for its centenary city celebrations. People may learn not only about Edith Annie Lees and Helen Watts, but about the Nottingham suffragettes who burned down the men-only Nottingham boat club in 1913—there is obviously a bit of an east midlands theme. They may be astonished that the club did not accept women into membership for another 57 years. As the Home Secretary acknowledged, it is some 48 years since the House passed the Equal Pay Act, and yet women still face a gender pay gap of more than 18%. When does she think that we will eliminate it?

**Amber Rudd:** Gosh, it has been an interesting day of stories, what with boat clubs and golf clubs and the militant march of women. I hope that that will happen

soon. That is why we are taking action on the gender pay gap and insisting that companies report by April this year. In my conversations with companies that are putting reporting in place, it is clear that they are surprised at the revelation of a gender pay gap and they are then proposing action. In one example, after a company discovered that many more men than women were in higher-paid jobs, it put in place training programmes. Those concrete actions will help to eradicate the gender pay gap.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement about the grant programme to celebrate women's suffrage. Will she confirm that the programme will celebrate the sacrifices of the suffragettes and the work of the thousands of women and men across the country who campaigned painstakingly for decades for women to be given the vote? Will she also confirm that the scheme will look not only backwards to celebrate but forward at the work that still needs to be done and which many Members have mentioned today?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that this funding and these projects must be about looking forward. We want to celebrate the past and the achievements to date, but we also want to keep up the pressure and the change and to work with the new generation to ensure that they have the opportunities to come forward. The purpose of these grants is to encourage local organisations to bid, so that they can make such proposals. I hope that organisations from Brentford and Isleworth will do just that.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Today is a very important day. It is right that we celebrate. I think particularly of my daughter and of what society her generation will inherit—will theirs finally be the generation that sees equality across all areas of public life? To assist with that, when my daughter and other young women visit Parliament, I want them to see more female role models immortalised in this place. I think particularly of Winnie Ewing and my late friend Margo MacDonald. Will the Minister work with the Vote 100 campaign and the House authorities, through you, Mr Speaker, to ensure that that enduring inequality in this place is finally ended?

**Amber Rudd:** Yes. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. It is delightful to hear that he took his daughter around to see the great opportunity and stature of this place. I hope it gave her some inspiration. He has put his finger on it. It is all about ensuring equality for women, but there is still so much to do and I hope that he will support some of our plans this year.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's statement about encouraging more women into Parliament and I am immensely proud to be here today representing my home seat 100 years after women first got the vote. Does she agree that sitting well beyond 10 pm, as we did numerous times in December, is hardly family friendly and hardly encourages women to enter Parliament? Does she further agree that a lot more still needs to be done, including introducing baby leave, as proposed by my right hon.

[*Ellie Reeves*]

and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), to make this place more welcoming and open to future female MPs?

**Amber Rudd:** I agree in principle with the hon. Lady. This House has come a long way, as Members who have been here a lot longer than me would point out. There are occasionally longer sittings, but I think that they are pretty unpopular with many Members of Parliament. I urge the Chief Whip and shadow Chief Whip to engage in more constructive discussions. It takes both parties to agree not to sit past 10 pm.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): We obviously need more women to be elected to this House, but may I draw the Minister's attention to local government? In the not-too-distant past, only males were elected to some local councils. When young female councillors are elected, the problem is not so much the abuse they might get during the election process, but the treatment they receive from council officers: they are spoken down to, mainly by male officers; told they do not know what they are doing when they are elected; often are not offered appropriate training; and often either leave office early or do not seek re-election—all because of the treatment they receive inside local government.

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Council election is often the first step women take before becoming a parliamentary candidate. The number of women in local government is shockingly low. We all need to do more to ensure that we find women in our constituencies willing to stand for the local council. The example he describes is very unsatisfactory. We need to be vigilant to make sure that women who do take the step are not talked down to.

**Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): I am proud to be Croydon's first female MP and I have been learning this week about the suffragette Dorinda Neligan, who, as well as being arrested outside this place, was the first headteacher of an all-girls school in Croydon, despite complaints about strong-minded women encouraging girls to be dissatisfied with life at home. I am proud to be surrounded by many strong-minded women today. What can the Government do to promote more strong women in our school curriculum, from English literature to history, where we remain woefully under-represented?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady has highlighted the issue of girls in schools and the need to be vigilant to make sure that there is no sexism at that level. Women who have written great works or are great historians need to be ably represented in school. I suggest that her question is more specifically for the Department for Education, but I will certainly have a word with the Secretary of State to ensure that that is the case.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she join me in paying tribute to the group of women in Durham who this year are not only helping to organise the Durham miners' gala but are reinstating the women's gala on 30 June to celebrate 100 years of women's suffrage?

**Amber Rudd:** I am delighted to join the hon. Lady in commending those women and welcoming their participation. Participation in public life can start with some small civic act and lead, as it did for many women here, to becoming a councillor and then a Member of Parliament. That first stage of activism in civic life is so important in encouraging women eventually into Parliament.

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): Chesterfield is very proud today of Winifred Jones, a suffragette who was jailed twice during the suffragette struggle. I am sure that Winifred would be delighted to know that Chesterfield Borough Council now has a woman leader and a woman deputy leader and that the chair, the secretary and the treasurer of Chesterfield Labour party are all women. The Minister is absolutely right that this is no time for partisanship, so it was disappointing that she reflected purely on the misogynistic abuse from the left. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) faced appalling abuse from people on the right. Would it not be best today to recognise that across the political spectrum there are people who engage in misogynistic abuse and that we all have to work collectively to get rid of them from our political discourse?

**Amber Rudd:** I would be cautious about not calling out abuse where it happens. The hon. Gentleman is right up to a point—as I have said, there has been appalling abuse of Labour Members as well. If, however, we tiptoe politically too much around the cause—I refer him to Claire Kober's comments last weekend—we do not help women who themselves would like us to call it out.

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): I am proud to stand here as Burnley's MP on this historic day and to reflect on the work and achievements of the suffragettes and suffragists. Does the Minister agree that a fitting tribute to their work would be at the very least to guarantee the safety of all women in our communities? As we stand here today, women who are victims of domestic violence are taking the brave step of leaving and seeking refuge, but only too often they find that their refuge is full or sometimes closed down—the likely fate of the refuge in my constituency. I understand that the Government intend to review domestic violence legislation, but I fear that for many women that will be too late. Will the Minister join me in saving these important facilities and doing our bit to stand up for women?

**Amber Rudd:** I share the hon. Lady's view that those refuges provide essential support for women who are victims of domestic abuse and I am proud that we have more beds available now than we had in 2010. She is right that we are conducting a review. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is doing that review, but I will work closely with it to ensure that there is no reduction in the number of beds available. That will be a central part of our domestic abuse Bill, which will be coming forward later this year.

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): This is an amazing day for all of us women who have been elected to Parliament. I am the 201st woman to be elected.

I think today reminds us that so often when we study history, women's participation in it, and contribution to it, is not celebrated or talked about. This is about ordinary people, ordinary women, doing extraordinary things. Does the Home Secretary agree that it would be a wonderful contribution to this centenary year if we asked all MPs to provide a story about the women in their constituencies or areas who did something for the suffrage movement? It could be kept in the House to be used by the education service, so that there will be no reason for future generations of boys and girls not to understand the contribution that women made.

**Amber Rudd:** I think that that is an excellent idea. I have a very good story from Hastings, which I am longing to put in that book.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to recognise all the women who are currently serving in this place and the other place and those who have gone before us? We may not always agree politically, or see eye to eye, but I absolutely recognise the courage that many have shown to get here.

I agree with the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) that it is important for the police and the criminal justice agencies to understand that, when female MPs—or, indeed, male MPs—come forward with stories of abuse, whether it be online or otherwise, they must be taken seriously. We do not necessarily want to be making those police reports. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my own recent experience with the Home Secretary.

Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), I think it extremely important—I have raised this point with the Prime Minister—that we recognise that abuse comes from all sides of the political spectrum. I acknowledge that it comes from my own party, which makes me incredibly ashamed, and I would never condone it. However, I have been subject to some significant abuse from the right. I think that the more we make this a party-political issue, the more we are prevented from making progress.

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady has made a characteristically important point. On the issue of abuse, I do not really share her view. Speaking honestly, I do not think that this is about being party-political. The fact is that plenty of Labour MPs have come to talk to me about the abuse that they have received from Momentum. It is not just we who receive such abuse. It is fine if some members of the Labour party do not want to call it out,

but I think it is fair that we call it out because I do not think it is helpful to ignore it. We can talk about “all sides” and, of course, horrific abuse also comes from the right, although it does not, I think, come from members of the Conservative party. So I think there is a difference and I do not think it is helpful to ignore it.

As for the reporting of domestic abuse or any violence against women, the position has improved. Far more reporting is taking place and it is largely true that the police engage with it in a completely different way from the way in which they engaged with it 20 years ago. I think we should all welcome that, although, as in so many other instances in which there has been progress in respect of the protection of women and women's rights, there is always more to do.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Let me wish everyone a happy feminist Christmas, which is what today feels like. I started the morning at 8.45 with everyone dressed in their Sunday best, and it genuinely feels like a happy moment in this place to celebrate something genuinely happy.

Following what the Home Secretary has just said about abuse, I have a suggestion for her that would make Labour women very happy. If she is hearing the concerns of Labour women, she could say today that she will do the following, and it will make Labour women very happy. When I see metro mayors and police and crime commissioners, I do not notice that any of them looks particularly like me. There is a huge problem with the representation of women in that regard. There is a very simple thing that the Government could agree to do today: they could agree to allow all-women shortlists to be used and agree to add a provision to the Equality Act 2010, so that they could be used for those positions. At present, it is illegal for the Labour party to use all-women shortlists. If the Home Secretary would like to do Labour women a solid, that is the one that we would ask for today.

**Amber Rudd:** I hate to let down the hon. Lady, who is such an extraordinary champion for women. All Conservative Members are full of admiration for the work that she does. However, she clearly has not noticed the Sussex police and crime commissioner, Katy Bourne, who does a fantastic job and is particularly focused on protecting women. That reminds us how important it is to have women in those senior roles. [HON. MEMBERS: “And Vera Baird.”] And Vera Baird as well—I thank hon. Members for the reminder. There is more that all of us can do to encourage women to put themselves forward for roles such as police and crime commissioner and mayor.

## Points of Order

2.14 pm

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, the Minister for Immigration told the House that the immigration White Paper would be published “in the coming months”. This morning, in the media, the Home Secretary could only say that it was likely to be published before Brexit day in March 2019. Given the apparent discrepancy, Mr Speaker, do you agree that it would be helpful to have some clarity from the Home Secretary? Have you had any indication from her that, in the absence of an immigration White Paper, she will at least make a statement to the House setting out all the outstanding issues relating to the transition arrangements, the registration policy and the Government’s immigration objectives in the negotiations?

**Mr Speaker:** I have not, but it would. Let me recap, in case some colleagues have forgotten the earlier part of the right hon. Lady’s point of order. I have not received an indication that any such statement is planned, but it would be helpful to have a guide as to the likely sequence of events. There is no obligation for the Home Secretary to provide any such information now, or indeed from the Dispatch Box at any time, but, knowing this place as I have come to know it, it is perfectly obvious that if such clarification is not provided, it will not be beyond the wit and ingenuity of colleagues to raise this matter continually on the Floor of the House in circumstances that require the presence of a Minister. The sooner it is clarified, the better.

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd):** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I thank the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) for her point of order, and I thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to respond. The right hon. Lady has written me a substantial letter, which I received yesterday, and I look forward to replying to it with the clarification that she seeks.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful to the Home Secretary.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) *rose*—

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I will call the shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government first. I have the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) in mind; he need not worry.

**Andrew Gwynne:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is further to my point of order on 24 January, following which I wrote to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to ask whether the serious allegations set out in *The MJ*—otherwise known as *The Municipal Journal*—were true. Those allegations were that the Secretary of State had knowingly misled the House on figures published in the provisional local government settlement and had knowingly misled right hon. and hon. Members in the answers that he had given to their respective questions.

Yesterday I received a letter from the Secretary of State confirming that he and the Department knew “the overall scale of the error”

but nevertheless

“published the provisional settlement on 19th December on the basis of”

those “statistics”. At no stage in the proceedings did the Secretary of State advise the House that those data were incorrect, and many local authorities based their 2018 budget settings on the figures that he gave in his statement of 19 December, believing them to be correct. That is now creating a damaging lack of trust in the Ministry across local government.

More seriously, however, the Secretary of State has not publicly apologised to the House, but both “Erskine May” and the ministerial code go further, stating that Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament—that is now the case—must offer their resignation to the Prime Minister. Has the Secretary of State indicated to you, Sir, that he plans to make a personal statement to the House on his conduct in relation to this matter?

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer to the hon. Gentleman, to whom I am grateful for giving me an indication of his intention to raise his point of order, is no. I have received no such indication from the Secretary of State.

The hon. Gentleman is a notable eager beaver in the House. He is most assiduous in the discharge of his duties, and he obviously wanted to be here today to air his serious concern about this matter, invoking third-party support as he developed his argument. Let me say to him that I think that his opportunity for direct exchange will come ere long. Local government finance is to be debated in the Chamber tomorrow. It is a reasonable expectation of the hon. Gentleman that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will be in his place on the Treasury Bench, ready to speak from the Dispatch Box, and I have a hunch that the hon. Gentleman will be in his place, and very likely leaping up from it to interject on the Secretary of State in pursuit of satisfaction. The House will be agog to witness those exchanges.

**Andy McDonald** *rose*—

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am saving up the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis); as I often say, it would be a pity to squander him at too early a stage of our proceedings.

**Andy McDonald:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, in his statement to the House, the Secretary of State for Transport was asked by the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne):

“How good is Lord Adonis’s memory”

in connection to the collapse of East Coast. The Secretary of State replied:

“I am not a doctor, but I know that there is no record whatever of any ban on National Express continuing to bid for franchises after 2009”.—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2018; Vol. 635, c. 1247.]

That was when it defaulted on east coast rail.

That is entirely incorrect. On 1 July 2009, Lord Adonis told Parliament that National Express was banned, as recorded in *Hansard*. He said:

“It would clearly be reasonable not to invite a company to bid for future franchises in circumstances where it had recently failed to deliver on a previous franchise. A company which had defaulted in the way that National Express now intends would not have pre-qualified for any previous franchises let by the department.”—*[Official Report, House of Lords, 1 July 2009; Vol. 712, c. 226.]*

Lord Adonis has made it clear that the ban was based on advice from the Department.

The ministerial code says:

“Ministers must give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.”

Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, of whether the Secretary of State’s statement amounts to a breach of the ministerial code, and how an appropriate apology and correction might be secured from him?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, whom I indulged fully as he developed his point of order. I say with respect to the latter part of his observations, in respect of an alleged breach of the ministerial code, that I am not its arbiter. It is not for the Chair to adjudicate upon whether a Minister has breached the ministerial code. Whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not, that is in the hands of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister looks at such matters, or can ask others to look at them on her behalf, but it is not a matter for the Chair.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter, and although it is not—simply as a matter of constitutional fact—a point of order for the Chair, he has none the less taken the opportunity to put his concerns on the record. It is up to the Government if they wish to respond to the matter he raises, because there is absolutely no doubt that Ministers will have heard what he had to say—it will have been heard on the Treasury Bench, and it either will have been heard, or will very soon be heard, by the particular Minister at whom his remarks were directed.

**Clive Lewis:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your advice pertaining to the powers and privileges of the House. You will recall the recent debate I led on the treatment of small and medium-sized businesses by the state owned bank the Royal Bank of Scotland, after which this House voted unanimously for a full inquiry. Since that debate, I have received a full and unredacted copy of the Financial Conduct Authority investigation into RBS, which the FCA has so far refused to release, including to the Treasury Committee. Having read the document, I believe it shows that RBS executives misled the Select Committee in their evidence and have a stated policy of misleading Members of this House. Far from being isolated incidents of poor governance, as they claimed to the Committee, the report explicitly states that their behaviour was “systemic and widespread”. In one shocking passage of the report, out of hundreds, the bank boasted that one family business was set to “lose their shirts” so that RBS could get a “chunky equity deal.” Furthermore, it is clear that the summary of the report the FCA has published is what I would politely describe as a sanitised version.

The chair of the FCA, Andrew Bailey, is giving evidence to the Select Committee tomorrow. *First*, in light of that, Mr Speaker, may I ask your permission to

hand over the full unredacted report to both you and the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), the Chair of the Treasury Committee, whom I note is unable to be in the Chamber at the moment?

Secondly, Mr Speaker, may I ask you to confirm that parliamentary privilege will apply to any Member or the Select Committee should they choose to refer to the report in the House? Finally, might I ask your guidance on whether deliberately misleading a Select Committee of this House would constitute contempt of Parliament, and what recourse this House has when that occurs?

**Mr Speaker:** I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and his courtesy in giving me advance notice of it. It is not for me either to give or to deny the hon. Gentleman permission to hand over the report to the Chair of the Select Committee; the hon. Gentleman must, and I am sure will, take responsibility for his own actions. For my part, I must say to the House, as well as to the hon. Gentleman, that I do not wish to receive a copy. That is for two very good reasons. First, I have a very full reading list, in so far as the hon. Gentleman has the remotest interest in my personal habits. Secondly, and more importantly, I do not wish to receive a copy of the report because however important its contents and however they may be a source of perturbation to many people, they are not a matter for the Chair. Should the Treasury Committee wish to procure this document, I am sure that it could take steps to do so. The hon. Gentleman would also be well advised to take legal advice if he plans wider disclosure of the document he has received.

I can confirm that the hon. Gentleman’s comments in this House are covered by privilege. That is, it has to be said, perhaps just as well, since he has already uttered them. Deliberately misleading a Select Committee of the House would constitute a contempt. The proper course of action for a Member wishing to complain of a breach of privilege is to write to me. There have been a number of examples of this, so I can authoritatively tell the hon. Gentleman that that is the proper course open to him. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman and that he will go about his business at least moderately satisfied.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I have also seen the full report, which refers to an “intentional and co-ordinated strategy by management” and makes clear the responsibility of the RBS board for the mistreatment of small businesses. I have raised this matter through a series of parliamentary questions with Ministers, and I raised it in the debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), but so far the Government have declined to give an opinion on the summary of the report. The full report goes significantly further, and as my hon. Friend said, there is a suggestion that Parliament might well have been misled about what the full report says. RBS is owned by the Government, and the Government should surely be expressing a view about what is in the report, so can you advise me, Mr Speaker, how to go about getting the Government to express an opinion on what is in the summary and what is in the full report and to explain the discrepancies between the two?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman invests me with powers that I do not possess: it is not for me to cajole or exhort, or still less to require a ministerial response on

[Mr Speaker]

this matter, because I simply do not have the locus to do so. What I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that if he desires a ministerial response, there are a number of routes open to him. He can continue his attempt at questioning—he can beetle along to the Table Office if he wishes to table further questions—and there are other mechanisms in the Chamber that he can try if the matter is potentially urgent. I do not know whether it is and I make no guarantee, but he knows what route is open to him if he thinks it could be. More particularly, on the strength of what I have heard, off the top of my head, I say to the hon. Gentleman that if the Select Committee has an interest in this matter, it is perfectly open to it to request a response from a Minister either through correspondence, or by inviting the relevant Minister to appear before the Committee. So the resources of civilisation—and even, indeed, of the House of Commons—have not yet been exhausted on this matter, and I think that should bring a smile to the face of the hon. Gentleman.

## **Domestic Properties (Minimum Energy Performance)**

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

2.29 pm

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to ensure that domestic properties have a minimum energy performance rating of C on an Energy Performance Certificate; and for connected purposes.

First, I join the five ladies in my family and all the residents of Southend West in celebrating the 100 years of votes for women.

The House will be well aware of the consequences of fuel poverty. As someone who comes from the east end of London, I well remember families not being able to pay the coalman to deliver coal to our properties. It is widely acknowledged that improved energy efficiency offers substantial health benefits. Indeed, there is a clear link between ill health and cold homes, where existing conditions such as respiratory illnesses or mental health issues are exacerbated. The Building Research Establishment recently estimated that the cost of cold and damp homes to the NHS was approximately £760 million a year. That is a substantial amount of money. Fuel poverty is responsible for many avoidable winter deaths and leaves some vulnerable people unable to heat their homes properly. It really is—dare I say it?—Dickensian that some elderly people are living their lives in the one room that they can afford to heat.

I have been fortunate to have successfully pioneered a handful of private Member's Bills on to the statute book. The one that I am particularly proud of is the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000. It was—as the violins play—in the year 2000 that I was finally drawn No. 5 in the private Members' Bill ballot. That was my 17th attempt. As so often happens when a Member is fortunate in the ballot, I was inundated with requests from an array of lobby groups. Finally, with about 10 minutes left to make my decision, I was approached by the wonderful Friends of the Earth, and I was very impressed. Friends of the Earth persuaded me to dedicate my Bill to tackling fuel poverty. The next year of my life was spent engaging in parliamentary warfare, in the nicest possible way, not so much with Opposition Members as with some Members on my own side. The widespread social issue of fuel poverty had, until then, not gained much parliamentary attention. The Bill that I was blessed to be able to pilot successfully through Parliament called on the Government not only to define the concept of fuel poverty but to recognise it as a distinct social problem. It aimed to eliminate fuel poverty entirely and called on the Government to devise a strategy for eradication by providing domestic insulation and other energy efficiency measures.

Good progress was made initially, and hundreds of thousands of people are estimated to have been taken out of fuel poverty as a result of that measure. Figures show that in 2015, 79% of homes in England had an energy performance certificate rating of band D or better, compared with only 39% in 2005. Sadly, however, in 2009 the then Government utilised a legal loophole to avoid delivering on the principal aim of the Act.

The phrase “as far as reasonably practicable”, which was initially inserted to avoid forcing entry, was interpreted by the High Court as meaning that the Government could abandon the commitment to ending fuel poverty. My new Bill, the Domestic Properties (Minimum Energy Performance) Bill, aims to plug that loophole exploited by the Government.

The Bill will have two primary dimensions. The first concerns those homes that are classified as fuel poor. Last year’s “Annual fuel poverty statistics report” states:

“A household is considered to be fuel poor if it has higher than typical energy costs and would be left with a disposable income below the poverty line if it spent the required money to meet those costs.”

The Bill will require the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to prepare a plan to bring all fuel-poor homes up to energy performance certificate band C by 2030. The Conservative party committed itself to bringing all fuel-poor homes up to EPC band C by 2030 in last year’s manifesto, which stated:

“We will improve the energy efficiency of existing homes, especially for the least well off, by committing to upgrading all fuel poor homes to EPC Band C by 2030.”

What impact will this have? As an illustration, upgrading a home’s energy efficiency from EPC band E to band D reduces energy costs by £380 a year on average. Moreover, the annual running cost of a band C-rated home is £270 lower than the average band D-rated home, and £650 less than the average band E-rated home.

The second dimension of my Bill concerns those homes not classified as fuel poor. In other words, it has a longer-term aim of bringing all other homes up to the same EPC band C standard by 2035. Given that that will be a more onerous task, my Bill takes account of that burden by providing the Secretary of State with an additional five years in which to achieve that ambitious objective. Again, this echoes the commitments made in my party’s 2017 manifesto. It also reiterates the commitments pledged in the clean growth strategy, which states:

“We want all fuel poor homes to be upgraded to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C by 2030 and our aspiration is for as many homes as possible to be EPC Band C by 2035 where practical, cost-effective and affordable.”

In addition to those two fundamental objectives, the Bill will also require the Minister to maximise new and innovative technologies and to consider how best they can be utilised to realise the Bill’s aims. The United Kingdom has always been an innovative nation, and I know that encouraging innovation and enterprise is close to the heart of the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry). However, industry needs certainty. Certainty will arguably persuade innovators to invest in the novel technologies necessary to provide the materials required to warm cold homes.

I wish to deal with some concerns that one or two Members have raised with me. First, let me deal with the Bill’s impact on devolved powers. I can assure the House that my Bill will not infringe on the devolved powers granted to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I understand that Scotland and Wales have separate fuel poverty targets, but clause 1(5) will specifically prevent the Secretary of State from taking action without consultation with the devolved Administrations. It states:

“The Secretary of State must have the agreement of the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers and the relevant Northern Ireland department before taking actions relating to devolved matters in pursuance of the duties in subsections (1) and (2).”

Secondly, the House will be pleased to hear that, by using the method suggested in the Treasury Green Book, my Bill is revenue neutral, and I hope that that will counter any objections regarding its financial implications. I have also taken the liberty of placing a copy of a revenue-neutral balance sheet in the Library of the House for Members to examine if they so wish. Finally, this is also a Bill with logical caveats. It will require the Secretary of State to bring homes up to EPC band C standard only where

“it is practical, cost-effective and affordable.”

It would not therefore apply to someone living in an old and extremely large property such as—dare I say it?—a stately home. The Bill is therefore a reasoned and logical approach to finally ending fuel poverty—the ambition that I originally had in the year 2000—and I commend it to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered.*

That Sir David Amess, Peter Aldous, Richard Benyon, Sir Graham Brady, Martyn Day, Sir Edward Davey, Mary Glendon, Carolyn Harris, James Heapey, Mr Bernard Jenkin, Dame Caroline Spelman and Daniel Zeichner present the Bill.

Sir David Amess accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 March, and to be printed (Bill 161).*

## SPACE INDUSTRY BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

*Ordered.*

That the Order of 15 January 2018 (Space Industry Bill [Lords] (Programme)) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs (4) and (5) of the Order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.—  
(Joseph Johnson.)

## Space Industry Bill [Lords]

*Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee*

### New Clause 1

#### POTENTIAL IMPACT OF LEAVING THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE UNITED KINGDOM'S SPACE INDUSTRY

(1) The Secretary of State must carry out and publish an assessment of the potential impact that leaving the European Union will have on the United Kingdom's space industry.

(2) The assessment under subsection (1) must make reference to the following areas—

- (a) the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on research and development and access to funding, including Horizon 2020;
- (b) the free movement to the UK from the EU of those who work in the space industry;
- (c) the UK's participation in the Galileo and Copernicus programmes; and
- (d) the impact of the UK leaving the Single Market on supply chains within the space industry.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay a report of the assessment before Parliament within one year of this Act passing.

(4) If an assessment of the impact of leaving the European Union on the UK's space industry has already been undertaken, the Secretary of State must lay a report of this assessment before Parliament and publish it on the day on which this Act is passed.—(Layla Moran.)

*This new clause would ensure the Government prepares and publishes an impact assessment of the potential impact on the space industry as a result of the UK leaving the EU.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

2.41 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 2—*Potential impact of leaving the EU on the UK space industry (No.2)*—

(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, lay before Parliament a report setting out a summary of any discussions between the UK Government and the European Union on the future relationship between the UK space industry and the European Union, following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must make reference to, but is not limited to—

- (a) options for future cooperation and partnership between the UK space industry and the European Union; and,
- (b) any new arrangements with, or proposed access to, EU space programmes, following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

*This new clause would ensure that Parliament is kept up to date with negotiations between the UK and European Union in regards to the UK space industry, in order to provide clarity to the UK space industry*

**Layla Moran:** I rise to speak to new clause 1, which is in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends and would require the publication of an assessment of the impacts of leaving the EU on the space industry. I do not wish to take up too much of the House's time rehashing the arguments about the impact of Brexit on

the space industry, as many such arguments were made on Second Reading, in Committee and in the other place, but I briefly want to place on the record the industry's continuing concerns, which should require the Government to publish an assessment of the sort set out in new clause 1. I will take each of the areas that I would like to see in such a report in turn, starting with research and development and Horizon 2020.

The Minister is a former Science Minister, so I do not need to explain to him the importance of certainty for scientists in the space industry. Sadly, however, we still do not have that certainty so many months later. The UK is a net beneficiary of EU space funding, contributing 12.5% of the total budget but winning contracts worth 14% of total spend. The British space industry needs a guarantee of continued access to research and development funding, expertise and facilities currently provided at EU level after the UK leaves the EU. Of course, the European Commission also provides space-related research funding through Horizon 2020, and the Government have said they will guarantee successful bids made by UK participants before exit. However, beyond that the sector has had only warm words, and it needs certainly beyond the next few years. The Government's science and innovation discussion paper states that the UK would "welcome discussion" on remaining a participant in certain EU science and innovation programmes.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): If the guarantee is only for another two years, there will be a profound effect on research and development, particularly in universities. If there is no guarantee beyond that, there will be a great deal of uncertainty for both universities and the industry.

**Layla Moran:** The hon. Gentleman is right, and my constituency is affected by such uncertainty.

I repeat a point that I made during the passage of the Nuclear Safeguards Bill: we must remember that this is not just about funding. At a recent hearing of the Public Accounts Committee, of which I am a member, witnesses were clear that the most valuable asset we have as a nation is our ability to attract human capital. To put it bluntly, the funding follows the brains. There is real consternation across the entire science industry that European scientists are actively looking to move, if they have not already, to more welcoming countries. Their lives are more than just their jobs; this is about where they live, love and participate in the community, so the tone of this debate matters hugely. It is therefore critical that we maintain freedom of movement for the world-class scientists, specialists and technicians who contribute to the space industry, so that we keep those brains and the funding here.

Patrick Wood, CEO of Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd, an existing supplier to Galileo, has said that "there are still a lot of unknowns"

about whether UK space companies will be able to access high-quality staff post-Brexit, noting that UK space infrastructure companies

"have a high percentage of staff that come from across Europe" partly due to a lack of UK applicants. Aerospace companies are heavily reliant on the rapid movement of workers between different sites. A favourite fact of mine is that Airbus moved employees 80,000 times between

the EU and the UK in 2016. It even has its own jet shuttle between Toulouse and Broughton. Any additional border checks between the UK and the EU could therefore prove a significant burden.

On Galileo, the European Commission is demanding the right to cancel existing contracts with UK companies that are constructing the £10 billion Galileo satellite navigation system unless the UK negotiates a new security relationship with the EU. If no long-term agreement can be found, UK companies may only be able to retain their contracts by setting up EU subsidiaries. With them will go the tax take, the brains and the supporting jobs.

Finally, I turn to the crucial effect of leaving the single market on supply chains within the UK space industry. Last year, I asked the Minister, in his former role, a series of parliamentary questions about the impact on the UK space sector supply chain of leaving the single market, but sadly there was not much in the answers to give heart to the industry. It has just not received the answers that it needs. Stuart Martin, CEO of the Satellite Applications Catapult said that

“Brexit represents a risk to the United Kingdom in sustaining its leadership position”

among sectors such as satellite manufacturing and navigation services. He also stated that the UK needs to sustain its leadership role within the European Space Agency and maintain access to the single market. Before anyone says, “But we will stay in the European Space Agency,” yes we will, but we must not forget that a quarter of its funding comes from the EU.

It is clear that the industry needs certainty on all those issues. We have had warm words, but not enough action. The Government’s shambolic handling of impact assessments and sectoral analyses, as well as this week’s uncertainty over future customs arrangements, is not inspiring confidence among the space industry. There are few specific commitments or guarantees in the Bill, so it is not unreasonable for the Government to publish an assessment of the sort that new clause 1 would require, and I hope that the Minister will consider doing so.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I start by passing on the apologies of my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who has been heavily involved in the Bill since the beginning. Unfortunately, she is extremely unwell this week and has uncharacteristically heeded her daughter’s advice by staying at home, but she is no doubt watching from her sickbed.

I rise to support new clauses 1 and 2, which attempt to ensure a proper assessment of the potential damage that an extreme Brexit could cause our space industry. During the passage of the Bill, we have had a glimpse of the opportunities ahead for the UK’s space industry, but this relates to the wider reaches of the EU. The EU funds space research through Horizon 2020, and we want to ensure that we remain a player beyond that point. Although the European Space Agency is separate from the EU, it does still receive significant funding from it, so we need to know whether the Government have made any assessment of the impact of Brexit on our space industries. Given the previous impact assessment fudge, the answer is probably, “Probably not, but if we have, we will not be publishing it anyway.” That is simply not good enough. The new clauses make it clear

that the Government will make that assessment and will publish it. If they do not accept these amendments, the question must be: what do the Government have to hide?

The European Commission has made it clear where it wants to go on space, so do the Government intend to remain part of the strategy and programme it has outlined? If we are not an integral part of the European space programme, what will be the impact on our viability as a spaceport centre, compared with other spaceports located within the European family?

How will we retain access to EU research and development projects, which are so important to our space industry? As has been mentioned, how will changes to freedom of movement affect this industry, an industry that exchanges talent across frontiers on a regular basis? Not all that talent will be at a salary threshold that allows easy access to the UK. Will we retain full access to programmes such as Galileo and Copernicus? Will we be marginalised in EU procurement decisions?

Those are all important questions for the Government to consider now, and they should be included in any impact assessment.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech that outlines the isolationist view that post-Brexit Britain is about to take. How does she square what the UK Government are saying about “global Britain” with the powerful points she has made this afternoon?

**Carol Monaghan:** We all want to see the space industry succeed, and we want to see it succeed on a global playing field, but we need to get this right. Requiring an impact assessment would make a big difference. We need to probe further on where our space industry will find itself in the increasingly likely event of a hard Brexit.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): New clause 2 would ensure that Parliament is kept up to date on negotiations between the UK and the European Union in regard to the UK space industry.

New clause 2 differs very slightly from new clause 1, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran). Both new clauses have the same aims. New clause 2 asks the Government to produce a summary of any discussions between the UK Government and the European Union to ensure that Parliament is kept up to date on the progress of the negotiations. Just as importantly, new clause 2 would also provide clarity to the UK’s space industry.

It goes without saying, or at least it should, that the Government must ensure we get the best possible deal with the EU to help support the UK space industry’s continued growth. That is the whole point of the Bill, and it is why the Labour party is broadly supportive of it. UKspace, the trade association of the UK space industry, claims:

“The UK leaving the EU has created significant uncertainty which is already affecting the integrated supply chain, R&D collaboration and joint programmes with other EU countries.”

As colleagues have pointed out, the UK space industry makes a noteworthy contribution to our economy and employs close to 40,000 people. The industry is currently highly dependent on EU-led space programmes. As a

[Karl Turner]

result, the Government must ensure the UK gets a deal that secures the long-term future and growth of our space industry to ensure that the Government's ambition for the UK to be a leading player in the global space industry is not just all talk and no action.

The Government provided a report to the Exiting the European Union Committee with a sectoral analysis of the UK space sector after our Opposition day debate on 1 November 2017—it is fair to say that we forced the issue. We welcome the Government publishing that document. However, the Opposition believe the document is not sufficient and that Parliament should be kept up to date with a further summary, which would also give the sector the additional clarity it asks for.

Any further uncertainty would hinder any potential growth in the UK space industry. New clause 2 is a reasonable and sensible amendment that would require the Government to publish a report setting out a summary within 12 months of Royal Assent, which is absolutely fair.

**Mr John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The hon. Gentleman speaks about growth in the industry. We heard a lot about growth on Second Reading, and the Minister has acknowledged the need for skills. Leaving aside new clause 2, but relevant to it, is there a case for cross-departmental work on developing those skills, given the complexity of meeting the industry's needs? Would the hon. Gentleman offer that as a possible compromise to the Minister?

**Karl Turner:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. I was about to say that I do not intend to divide the House on new clause 2, but I hope the Minister takes his point on board.

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson):** Like the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), the Government want the UK to make the most of the opportunities that lie ahead. We want the UK to be a go-to place for scientists, innovators and tech investors in the years ahead. We intend to secure the right outcomes for the UK research base, including our space community, as we exit the European Union.

As hon. Members will remember, the agreement that successfully concluded phase 1 of the exit negotiations in December 2017 made it clear that, as part of the financial settlement, the UK will remain part of Horizon 2020 until at least the end of this budget period in December 2020. As part of the new deep and special relationship with the EU, recognising our shared interest in maintaining and strengthening research collaboration, the UK will seek an agreement that promotes science and innovation, including on space, across Europe now and in the future. We would welcome a specific agreement to continue collaborating with our European partners on major science, space research and technology initiatives, and we will be approaching the upcoming negotiations on that basis.

New clause 1 would require the Government to undertake an assessment. As Members will remember, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union provided the

relevant Select Committees with reports on many sectors, including the space sector, on 27 November 2017. The space sector report contained a description of the sector, the current EU regulatory regime, the existing frameworks for facilitating trade, including between countries, and the sector views on it. Ministers have a specific responsibility, which Parliament has previously endorsed, not to release information that would undermine our negotiating position, and I know Members present understand that position.

On new clause 2, the Government's September partnership paper set out our intent with regard to discussing options for future co-operation and partnership with the EU through the EU space programme. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has given a clear undertaking to the House that he will keep the relevant Select Committees informed of progress in discussions with the EU Commission on EU exit matters. That commitment to openness needs to be balanced with the overriding national interest in preserving our negotiating position.

I recognise the interest of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) in how our future relationship with the EU will help support the continued strong growth in the space sector—it is an interest the Government share—but I hope he will appreciate that we cannot enter into commitments to inform Parliament about the EU exit negotiations on a sector-by-sector basis, through various bits of legislation. In the light of that, I ask the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon to withdraw new clause 1.

**Layla Moran:** I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

### New clause 3

#### PUBLICATION OF REGULATIONS

(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, lay a report before Parliament setting out details of the regulations issued under this Act.

(2) The report in subsection (1) must include, but is not limited to, regulations that have effect for licences for—

- (a) spaceports;
- (b) launch operators;
- (c) satellite operators; and
- (d) range control operators.

(3) Before exercising their duties under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must consult the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and have regard to their views in respect of any proposed regulations.

(4) As well as consulting those in subsection (3) the Secretary of State must consult with—

- (a) UKspace, and

(b) any other such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate." —(Carol Monaghan.)

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish clear guidelines on the regulations issued under this Act.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

3 pm

**Carol Monaghan:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 4—*Cap on licensees' liability limit*—

(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, lay a report before Parliament setting out plans for a cap on licensees' liability.

(2) Before exercising their duties under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must carry out a consultation on what an appropriate maximum limit would be on the amount of a licensee's liability, and lay a report before Parliament setting this out.

(3) The report under subsection (1) must provide for, but is not limited to—

- (a) a maximum limit on the amount of a particular licensee's liability for each launch undertaken by the operator;
- (b) a maximum limit on the amount of licensees' liability for each launch classification type;
- (c) divisions of responsibility and the level of liability for parties' spaceflight activities, including—
  - (i) the Spaceport;
  - (ii) the launch operator; and
  - (iii) the satellite operator.

(4) In subsection (3) "launch classification type" means the level of risk attached to each type of launch as determined by the regulator.

(5) Before exercising their duties under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must consult the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and have regard to their views in respect of any proposed regulations.

(6) As well as consulting those under subsection (5) the Secretary of State must consult with—

- (a) UKspace, and
- (b) any other such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate."

*This new clause would require the Government to consult on and set a mandatory cap on licensees' liability for each individual launch, based on the classification type of each launch.*

Amendment 4, in clause 9, page 8, line 24, at end insert—

(10) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, publish guidance about any regulations in relation to operator licences. Such guidance must be issued by the regulator (if the regulator is not the Secretary of State).

(11) The regulator must hold pre-licensing discussions with any potential operator before an operator licence can be issued to them.

(12) Discussions under subsection (11) must include, but are not limited to, providing potential operators with guidance on any regulations in relation to operator licences."

*This amendment would require the Secretary of State to publish guidance about any regulations issued in relation to operator licences, and to hold discussions with all potential operators before a licence can be issued to them, to ensure that the UK space industry is sufficiently aware of the regulatory framework.*

Amendment 1, in clause 68, page 44, line 35, after "offences," insert—

"(n) regulations under subsection (1) of this section"

*This amendment would make regulations made under section 68(1) subject to the affirmative procedure.*

Amendment 2, in schedule 6, page 61, line 2, after "authority" insert "and devolved administration"

*This amendment would make it a requirement that when an order is made to obtain rights over land, notices about the orders must be served to devolved administrations, where relevant.*

Amendment 3, page 61, line 22, after "authority" insert "and devolved administration"

*This amendment would make it a requirement that when an order is made to obtain rights over land, notices about the orders must be served to devolved administrations, where relevant.*

**Carol Monaghan:** Once again, this amendment stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who cannot be here this afternoon. New clause 3 will ensure that guidelines for spaceports are clear and published, and take into account the views of devolved Administrations and stakeholders. The devolved nations currently have the majority of the sites being considered for spaceports, so we are looking for some consultation in the event of rights being taken over land that would be with the devolved Government.

The lack of a liability cap in the Bill is causing us concern. New clause 4 would ensure that there must be a cap. It calls on the Government to come to Parliament, after consultation, and provide their plans on what an appropriate cap would be. A liability cap would bring our space industry into line with those of Australia, France and the USA, which is the world space leader. The purpose of the liability cap is to allow spaceflight operators to obtain affordable insurance—without it, the prohibitive cost of obtaining insurance for unlimited liability would undermine the growth of the space industry in the UK, which is the key point of the Bill. Simply put, without a cap in place, launches will not take place in the UK.

The industry stakeholders' main worry with the Bill is the absence of a mandatory liability cap for spaceflight operators. The Government have said that they need to be flexible, but if the industry is calling for a cap, they need to both listen and take action. We understand that a cap level will not necessarily be set at this point, but a guarantee that there will be a cap would go some way to providing assurance to the industry. The chairman of UKspace, Richard Peckham, has said that insurers have made it clear that they would not be prepared to do business without a benchmark, so it is vital this takes place.

Our new clause 4 would allow the Government to be flexible on the liability cap by creating different caps for different launches, given there will be quite a broad range of risk depending on the scale of the satellite. One mechanism that has been discussed in Committee is the red, amber and green risk assessment to describe different types of missions, with a different cap for each type of mission. I am not entirely convinced that that would be entirely useful, as clearly those classified as a red risk would not get a licence. However, this could be done by class, for example, with horizontal take-off vehicles carrying cube satellites being given a different classification from a vertical take-off vehicle carrying large satellites, as has happened elsewhere.

It is also important that we do not speak about liability per satellite and actually move towards a cap based on a per-launch system. That would be better suited to much of the growing UK industry. In Committee, I mentioned the importance of the cube satellite industry to Glasgow, which is second in the world, behind San Francisco, in the manufacture of cube satellites. Such satellites are often launched in clusters. If the figure for a liability cap were to be €60 million for each one of these tiny satellites, that would be prohibitive in terms of growing the industry.

[Carol Monaghan]

In the longer term, this issue could affect where future developments take place in the space industry. Some countries do not require satellites to be built locally, whereas other jurisdictions require satellites that are being launched to be built in the local area or in the country of launch. If cube satellite businesses do not get a mandatory liability cap in this Bill, there is a danger that future investment will be affected and a real possibility that when those businesses are looking to expand, they will do so in a jurisdiction where liability is capped and insurance can be obtained.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Is the hon. Lady saying that the taxpayer should stand behind the extra liability above the cap?

**Carol Monaghan:** That is exactly how the liability works: the insurer covers up to whatever that liability is and the rest is picked up by Government. Once that is picked up by Government, we have to look at the revenue that is generated from that industry and at the amount of growth and jobs created. If we look at proper regulations on our spaceports, liability or risk will be extremely low. Every other country that is launching has a liability cap. We cannot possibly compete unless we have that in place.

As I have said, I understand that the Minister has committed to looking at the issue of the cap and talking to industry leaders about this issue. As I have also said, I am not pressing today for a figure, but the indication that a cap will be in place will provide great reassurance for the UK space industry and will allow it to grow in the way in which we hope it will.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): In Committee, I heard the hon. Lady press the case for an unlimited liability cap. I also heard the Minister give an extraordinarily good and detailed explanation of the work that needed to go into the detailed preparation for such a cap. That is why it was decided in Committee not to put this measure in the Bill, by a vast majority, with cross-party support. It is not that we do not understand the need for this, but it needs to be set in the correct way.

**Carol Monaghan:** I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution, but I think she is missing the point, which is that there must be a cap in place for these companies to get insurance. Without it, they cannot get insurance, and without insurance, they cannot launch. If the Government are considering this cap, why is it not in the Bill? Why does the Bill not contain a statement that a cap will be put in place? I am not asking for a figure and I certainly did not talk about unlimited liability; we talked about limited liability. Unless this is in place, we are stifling a serious growth industry. So I call on the Government to accept the new clause and to listen to the concerns of the space industry.

**Mr John Hayes:** I intend to speak briefly on this issue, having heard what the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) said and having looked at these matters in my previous life, as it were. Liability is salient to this Bill. The Government have acknowledged that in what they have said and in the changes they have already made as a result of our consideration in Committee.

I pay tribute to the new Minister for the work he has done on this. It is right to say that he is continuing discussions with the industry. As the hon. Lady said, there is a fragility about the industry. That is not to say that it is not successful, growing or doing wonderful things, but when one innovates or is on the margins of innovation, as this industry is bound to be, given that it is pushing the frontiers ever further, of course one is in a risky business. To gain the necessary investment to make that innovation happen and to take on board those risks, one needs to create a framework of certainty, and the certainty is to some degree about liability.

If I may say so, though, there is a simpler way to deal with the hon. Lady's points. As I said, I shall be brief. I notice that the Government have already made changes to clause 35(3), where the word "may" has been changed to "must". They could make similar changes to clause 34(5). Were the Government obliged to make regulations to deal with liability, I think that would go a long way towards satisfying the hon. Lady. I have sufficient trust in the Minister and his Department to know that even with the word "may" in the provision, it is likely that, following the discussions that he and others are having with the industry, further regulations will be introduced for the very reasons the hon. Lady set out in a measured and moderate way.

It is vital that we create the investor confidence that will allow the industry to grow and, as I have said, push forward the frontiers of technology in what is necessarily a risky business. This can be a great success and the Bill takes us a long way towards enabling that success. To get the issue of liability right will be the icing on the cake, but as everyone who has ever dressed or consumed a cake knows, the icing is vital—it is what draws us in, encourages and seduces us to consume the cake. With that overture, I hope that the Minister can provide the reassurance that the industry and I seek and that on that basis the hon. Lady might see fit to withdraw her new clause, although that is a matter not for me but very much for her.

**Layla Moran:** I rise to speak briefly to amendments 1, 2 and 3.

Amendment 1 deals with the catch-all powers in the Bill and, at your discretion, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall seek to press it to a vote. In the House of Lords, the Government agreed to remove the Henry VIII power from the Bill in response to concerns expressed by my Liberal Democrat colleagues in the other place and by Lord Judge, the former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales. However, there is still a need to go further to tackle the Government's power grab.

Several stakeholders have expressed concerns about the Bill's skeletal nature. In particular, the House of Lords Constitution Committee said that some of the powers in the Bill were "very broad" and that the Bill would be "challenging for Parliament to scrutinise meaningfully"

because so many of its powers were delegated to Ministers. That Committee also expressed concerns about a power in clause 68 that allows Ministers to make regulations but which might prevent people from being able to take the Government to court for judicial review because the Government could easily argue that their powers were within the Bill's scope. The power permits the Government to make almost any law relating to

"space activities...sub-orbital activities, and...associated activities...carried out in the United Kingdom."

That covers pretty much anything to do with the industry.

In response to the raising of such concerns in the other place, the Government suggested that there was no need for concern and, according to Baroness Sugg, that the powers were needed to

“deal with any unexpected circumstances.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 28 November 2017; Vol. 787, c. 613.]

I am afraid that that is not good enough. Liberal Democrats remain concerned that the scope of clause 68 is far too wide. We believe that, if the Government are not willing to remove the power or to limit its scope, it is only right and proper to increase parliamentary scrutiny of legislation passed under the power, which is why I shall seek to divide the House on amendment 1, which would require any new secondary legislation passed using clause 68 to be subject to the affirmative procedure.

**Mr John Hayes:** I understand the hon. Lady’s point, but she must know that a Bill of this type essentially establishes what I called earlier a framework of certainty. This is a highly innovative industry and technology changes very rapidly. To be prescriptive about what the future might look like would be a woeful error. There has to be a degree of flexibility in the Bill, which she risks limiting by being prescriptive at this stage.

**Layla Moran:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I disagree that the amendment would prevent innovation. I think it would be absolutely fine. The affirmative procedure is employed in 13 other parts of the Bill. Parliamentary scrutiny should not just be waved away, as it has been in other Bills. All we are asking for is the affirmative procedure, which would allow Parliament to scrutinise regulations that little bit more.

3.15 pm

On amendments 2 and 3, it was noted in the other place that clauses 39 and 41 are essentially planning powers, so I question why they are going to be held in Westminster. It seems to me that the security powers should be shared between Westminster and the devolved Administrations. The Bill should enshrine a formal relationship between the UK and devolved Governments over the securing of launch sites, and there should be specific reference to the need of the UK Government to gain the consent of devolved Ministers, not least because as things currently stand information on the launch sites would be published in local papers, which would be the point at which civil servants in the devolved Administrations might find out.

The Government should go further and create a formalised process whereby the devolved Administrations could object to orders made under clauses 39 and 41. Amendments 2 and 3 would do just that by requiring notices of such orders to be sent to the devolved Administrations, where relevant, in addition to local authorities, so that they would be officially informed that an order had been served, rather than having to read about it or use some sort of grapevine to do their jobs well. I hope that the Minister will see that that would be a sensible step and accept the amendments.

**Karl Turner:** I rise to speak to amendment 4, which I tabled, as well as the remaining new clauses and amendments.

Amendment 4 would give clarity to the UK’s space industry. As it stands, the Bill makes no provision to ensure that the industry works with the Government to create the regulatory framework that it so badly needs. The amendment would increase the focus on making the UK commercially attractive for potential spaceflight operators. As with new clause 3, the amendment was tabled to press the Government to publish clear regulations for the UK space industry, which is one of the Bill’s key issues.

Under the amendment, the Secretary of State would have to publish guidance for any forthcoming regulations and hold regular discussions with any potential operator before a licence was issued. The UK’s space industry needs as much clarity as possible; we do not want further uncertainty that may hinder growth. If the Government do not get this right, they could quite possibly deter investment, recruitment and growth in the space sector. It will be interesting to hear the Minister’s views.

Labour Members generally support the aims of new clause 3, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). The Bill does not set out the criteria for awarding licences, and nor does it describe the procedures in any great detail, which is a problem. When I spoke to new clause 2, I alluded to the fact that Labour wants the UK space industry to grow in the coming years, but the Government need to get this legislation right and have had the opportunity to do so. The industry must be made aware of regulations. We agree that the Government should lay a report before Parliament setting out the proposed licensing regulations in detail. That is fair and reasonable.

On new clause 3(3), Labour tabled an amendment in Committee that would have ensured that if space activities were established in any of the devolved Administrations of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, their respective environmental agencies and bodies, and respective Governments, would be consulted before any decision was made to grant an operator licence in their jurisdictions. Unfortunately, our amendment was defeated, so I welcome new clause 3, which presses the issue a little further.

The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire also tabled new clause 4, which deals with the liability issue that came up time and again in Committee.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): There are 40,000 jobs in the UK space industry. Would it not deter investment if the Government did not implement a liability cap for the industry?

**Karl Turner:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. He is right to say that 40,000 jobs rely on such a measure. Colleagues on both sides of the House have made the point that investment may be deterred if that is not in place.

New clause 4 deals with this very important issue of liability. The issue has been raised at every stage of the Bill’s consideration, both here and in the other place. Labour broadly supports the Bill, as we have reiterated throughout its passage, because we want the industry to grow so that high-skilled, high-paid and secure work is created across the country. Labour previously tabled amendments to get a discussion going about a liability cap. My colleagues in the other place tabled an amendment that would have removed any cap on a licensee’s liability,

[Karl Turner]

but that was merely a probing amendment with the intention of grabbing the Government's attention so that they would seriously consider providing a definite liability cap in primary legislation. I am grateful to my colleagues in the other place for the work that they did. As I said in Committee, we were never opposed to a cap; we just wanted some clarity from the Government, as they must get this right. I think it fair to say that the Government have listened carefully to the points we made in Committee.

The UK space sector has made repeated representations to the Government that they should implement a cap for UK-licensed satellite launch operators. Britain's space industry wants the Government to introduce a cap, I think at around €60 million. The Bill makes no mention of that, apart from the vague and lax use of the word "may", which has now been amended to "must". We are aware, however, that the Government stated previously—I think in Committee—that they opposed writing into legislation a mandatory cap on liability, as well as mandatory compensation from the Government, because that might breach state aid rules. I would be really grateful to the Minister if he clarified this particular point.

The industry has maintained throughout that it would not be able to secure insurance without a benchmark liability figure. The ambiguity from the Government on this issue could put off potential investment in the industry, as we have already heard, and harm the growth that the Bill sets out to achieve.

Requiring the Government to consult on and set a mandatory cap on a licensee's liability for each launch individually, as well as basing it on the classification type of each launch, is reasonable and fair. We believe that the Government need to look again at this, and I see that the Minister is taking note of what is being said.

I will speak very briefly to Liberal Democrat amendments 1 to 3. Amendment 1 would make regulations made under clause 68 subject to the affirmative procedure. In the other place, Labour colleagues worked on a cross-party basis, it is fair to say, in an attempt to ensure that a number of the regulations under the Bill would be subject to the affirmative procedure. Labour also tabled a similar amendment in Committee. We are grateful to the Government for listening and taking on board the concerns raised in the other place, and the Bill now ensures that there is enhanced scrutiny of regulations under the affirmative procedure, which I am very glad to see.

Amendments 2 and 3 to schedule 6 are about ensuring that the devolved Administrations are notified when an order is made to obtain rights over land. In Committee, Labour tabled an amendment to ensure that, before any decisions or notices were made, there would be consultation with not only the relevant environment agencies of the devolved Administrations, but the devolved Administrations themselves. I pressed that amendment to a Division because I did not think that the Government went anything like far enough to ensure that the devolved Administrations would be involved in the overall process. Unfortunately, that amendment was defeated, but I hope that the Government have now fully appreciated its intent.

**Joseph Johnson:** I thank all hon. Members who have spoken to the measures tabled by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). In addition to new clause 3, she tabled new clause 4, which would introduce a mandatory requirement for the Government to lay a report before Parliament setting out their plans in relation to a cap on a licensee's liabilities. The new clause would also mandate consultation with the devolved Administrations and UKspace, a trade association of the UK space industry. The Government have consistently listened to the industry's concerns about liabilities, dating back to the early development of our policy by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), including with regard to the licensing of UK entities carrying out certain space activities and in the development of all the provisions in the Bill.

The Government are well aware that the main space launch nations, including France and the US, limit a launch operator's liabilities in some form, which is why the Bill contains powers for certain liabilities to be capped in licence conditions by way of regulations. Having such powers enables the UK to compete on a level playing field and allows the Government to share the burden of liabilities with operators.

However, launch from the UK is a new activity, and we should cap a launch vehicle operator's liability, and thereby confer contingent liability on the Government, only if there is clear evidence that that is necessary. It is therefore important that the Government are able first to gather such evidence. To do that, as has been highlighted in earlier stages of the passage of this Bill, we will undertake a call for evidence specifically on liability and insurance, and that will take place shortly after Royal Assent.

Alongside that, the UK Space Agency is already working on, and considering its approach towards, risk assessment, insurance and liability requirements for launch activities taking place from the UK. If, following that work and the call for evidence, a cap on the launch vehicle operator's liability for launch activities taking place from the UK is deemed appropriate, a full consultation will take place, which will include the publication of Government proposals and draft regulations. As I have said, this will be an open and comprehensive consultation that will include the devolved Administrations. Any proposals outlined in such a consultation will be subject to compliance with relevant trading rules, whether they are EU state aid rules, or other rules applying after our exit from the European Union.

**Mr John Hayes:** It seems that the Minister has exceeded even my expectations. The big billing that I gave him was entirely justified, because he has addressed exactly the point that was made earlier: we need to know precisely what the circumstances are as launch facilities are developed. The combination of a call for evidence and a potential consultation seems to go a very, very long way towards what those who asked for further work on liability wanted to achieve. I am delighted to hear what he has said in his brief contribution.

**Joseph Johnson:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his support for the Government's approach of gathering the evidence base in a call for evidence, and then, if necessary, holding a further consultation, particularly involving the devolved Administrations.

**Carol Monaghan:** Can the Minister offer any timeframe for the consultation and the ongoing process, because the industry would welcome that?

**Joseph Johnson:** The Government have committed to launch the call for evidence as soon as the Bill receives Royal Assent, which we hope will not be too long now. Should the evidence show that there is demand and a need for a liability cap of the kind that the hon. Lady has been describing, we will launch a formal consultation at that stage. That consultation will, properly, involve the devolved Administrations and others with interests in this matter.

Through amendment 4, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) rightly raises the importance of the timely provision of guidance to applicants for spaceflight operator licences, and the benefits of pre-application discussions between prospective applicants and the regulator. The Government fully recognise that all potential licence applicants under the Bill—spaceports, satellite operators, range control service providers and spaceflight operators—will need to understand the regulations and processes with which they will need to comply. I hope that my earlier responses to the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), who is speaking on behalf of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire, have helped Members to understand the approach that we will be taking.

Pre-licence application discussions are already a key part of current Civil Aviation Authority and UK Space Agency licensing, and they will remain a central part of the process for licences under the Bill. Such discussions benefit prospective licence applicants and the regulator, because they help to build effective working relationships. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East will be pleased to know that discussions of this sort are already under way with a number of interested companies.

3.30 pm

Finally, I turn to the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran). As hon. Members are aware, the Government have made considerable concessions in relation to delegated legislation under the Bill. We listened to concerns previously expressed about clause 68 and have been convinced by arguments that there is a need for enhanced parliamentary scrutiny in some areas. The Bill has therefore been amended to include a statutory duty to carry out a public consultation before making any regulations under the affirmative procedure. The Secretary of State will report to Parliament about any such consultation. It is proposed that subsequent regulations, if any, that would materially change the substance of the original instruments would also be subject to consultation. Amendment 1 would lead to a duplication of effort, and it is therefore not required.

The same is true of amendments 2 and 3, which once again raise the involvement of the devolved Administrations in the making of orders under clauses 39 and 41. The amendments are similar to a measure that was tabled by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire in Committee. Without going into the same detail, I will take this opportunity to remind hon. Members that before the introduction of the Bill, officials worked to agree this set of land provisions, and the devolved Administrations have confirmed they are content with them.

The current drafting of schedule 6 requires that notice of a proposal to make an order under clauses 39 or 41 must be published in local newspapers and served on the local authority. This gives a devolved Administration the opportunity to raise any concerns about a specific order. Should the devolved Administration be aggrieved by the making of an order, it will have the opportunity to apply to the High Court for the order to be quashed, as is provided for by schedule 7.

I reiterate the fact that any orders made under clauses 39 and 41 will be compatible with existing planning legislation, which means that nothing in the Bill will restrict the ability of local planning authorities to take planning decisions. That is important because it means that, should Ministers in the devolved Administrations wish to call in any planning decision in relation to the development of a spaceport site, their right to do so will not be affected by any provision in the Bill.

On that basis, I ask the hon. Member for Glasgow North West, speaking on behalf of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire, to withdraw new clause 3.

**Carol Monaghan:** I am happy to withdraw new clause 3, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

#### New Clause 4

##### CAP ON LICENSEES' LIABILITY LIMIT

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, lay a report before Parliament setting out plans for a cap on licensees' liability.

(2) Before exercising their duties under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must carry out a consultation on what an appropriate maximum limit would be on the amount of a licensee's liability, and lay a report before Parliament setting this out.

(3) The report under subsection (1) must provide for, but is not limited to—

- (a) a maximum limit on the amount of a particular licensee's liability for each launch undertaken by the operator;
- (b) a maximum limit on the amount of licensees' liability for each launch classification type;
- (c) divisions of responsibility and the level of liability for parties' spaceflight activities, including—
  - (i) the Spaceport;
  - (ii) the launch operator; and
  - (iii) the satellite operator.

(4) In subsection (3) “launch classification type” means the level of risk attached to each type of launch as determined by the regulator.

(5) Before exercising their duties under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must consult the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and have regard to their views in respect of any proposed regulations.

(6) As well as consulting those under subsection (5) the Secretary of State must consult with—

- (a) UKspace, and
- (b) any other such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.”

*This new clause would require the Government to consult on and set a mandatory cap on licensees' liability for each individual launch, based on the classification type of each launch.—(Carol Monaghan.)*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 33, Noes 277.*

**Division No. 114]**

**[3.33 pm**

**AYES**

Blackford, rh Ian	Hobhouse, Wera
Blackman, Kirsty	Hosie, Stewart
Brake, rh Tom	Jardine, Christine
Brock, Deidre	Lake, Ben
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Lamb, rh Norman
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Law, Chris
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Lloyd, Stephen
Davey, rh Sir Edward	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Day, Martyn	McDonald, Stuart C.
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Monaghan, Carol
Edwards, Jonathan	Moran, Layla
Farron, Tim	Newlands, Gavin
Gethins, Stephen	Sheppard, Tommy
Gibson, Patricia	Stephens, Chris
Grady, Patrick	Swinson, Jo

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**David Linden and**  
**Alison Thewliss**

**NOES**

Adams, Nigel	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Afolami, Bim	Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Afriyie, Adam	Costa, Alberto
Aldous, Peter	Courts, Robert
Allan, Lucy	Crabb, rh Stephen
Allen, Heidi	Davies, Chris
Amess, Sir David	Davies, David T. C.
Andrew, Stuart	Davies, Glyn
Argar, Edward	Davies, Philip
Atkins, Victoria	Dinenage, Caroline
Bacon, Mr Richard	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Docherty, Leo
Baker, Mr Steve	Dodds, rh Nigel
Baldwin, Harriett	Donelan, Michelle
Barclay, Stephen	Double, Steve
Baron, Mr John	Dowden, Oliver
Bebb, Guto	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Drax, Richard
Benyon, rh Richard	Duddridge, James
Beresford, Sir Paul	Duguid, David
Berry, Jake	Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Blackman, Bob	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Blunt, Crispin	Dunne, Mr Philip
Boles, Nick	Ellis, Michael
Bowie, Andrew	Elphicke, Charlie
Bradley, Ben	Eustice, George
Brereton, Jack	Evennett, rh David
Bridgen, Andrew	Fabricant, Michael
Brine, Steve	Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Bruce, Fiona	Fernandes, Suella
Buckland, Robert	Field, rh Mark
Burghart, Alex	Ford, Vicky
Burns, Conor	Foster, Kevin
Burt, rh Alistair	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Cairns, rh Alun	Frazer, Lucy
Cartlidge, James	Freeman, George
Cash, Sir William	Freer, Mike
Caulfield, Maria	Gale, Sir Roger
Chalk, Alex	Garnier, Mark
Chishti, Rehman	Gauke, rh Mr David
Chope, Sir Christopher	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Churchill, Jo	Gibb, rh Nick
Clark, Colin	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Clark, rh Greg	Girvan, Paul
Clarke, Mr Simon	Glen, John
Cleverly, James	Goldsmith, Zac

Goodwill, Mr Robert	Mak, Alan
Gove, rh Michael	Malthouse, Kit
Graham, Luke	Mann, Scott
Graham, Richard	Masterton, Paul
Grant, Bill	Maynard, Paul
Grant, Mrs Helen	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
Gray, James	McVey, rh Ms Esther
Grayling, rh Chris	Menzies, Mark
Green, Chris	Merriman, Huw
Green, rh Damian	Metcalfe, Stephen
Greening, rh Justine	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Milling, Amanda
Griffiths, Andrew	Mills, Nigel
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Milton, rh Anne
Hair, Kirstene	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Halfon, rh Robert	Moore, Damien
Hall, Luke	Mordaunt, rh Penny
Hammond, Stephen	Morgan, rh Nicky
Hancock, rh Matt	Morris, Anne Marie
Hands, rh Greg	Morris, David
Harper, rh Mr Mark	Morris, James
Harrington, Richard	Morton, Wendy
Harris, Rebecca	Mundell, rh David
Harrison, Trudy	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Hayes, rh Mr John	Murrison, Dr Andrew
Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Neill, Robert
Heaton-Harris, Chris	Newton, Sarah
Heaton-Jones, Peter	Nokes, rh Caroline
Henderson, Gordon	Norman, Jesse
Herbert, rh Nick	O'Brien, Neil
Hinds, rh Damian	Offord, Dr Matthew
Hoare, Simon	Opperman, Guy
Hollingbery, George	Paisley, Ian
Hollinrake, Kevin	Parish, Neil
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Patel, rh Priti
Howell, John	Pawsey, Mark
Huddleston, Nigel	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Hughes, Eddie	Penrose, John
Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Percy, Andrew
Jack, Mr Alister	Perry, rh Claire
James, Margot	Philp, Chris
Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Pincher, Christopher
Jenkyns, Andrea	Poulter, Dr Dan
Jenrick, Robert	Prentis, Victoria
Johnson, rh Boris	Prisk, Mr Mark
Johnson, Dr Caroline	Pritchard, Mark
Johnson, Gareth	Pursglove, Tom
Johnson, Joseph	Quin, Jeremy
Jones, Andrew	Quince, Will
Jones, rh Mr David	Raab, Dominic
Jones, Mr Marcus	Redwood, rh John
Kawczynski, Daniel	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Keegan, Gillian	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Kennedy, Seema	Robinson, Mary
Kerr, Stephen	Rosindell, Andrew
Knight, rh Sir Greg	Ross, Douglas
Kwarteng, Kwasi	Rowley, Lee
Lamont, John	Rudd, rh Amber
Lancaster, rh Mark	Rutley, David
Latham, Mrs Pauline	Sandbach, Antoinette
Leadsom, rh Andrea	Scully, Paul
Lee, Dr Phillip	Seely, Mr Bob
Lefroy, Jeremy	Selous, Andrew
Leigh, Sir Edward	Shannon, Jim
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Shapps, rh Grant
Lewer, Andrew	Sharma, Alok
Lewis, rh Brandon	Shelbrooke, Alec
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Loughton, Tim	Skidmore, Chris
Mackinlay, Craig	Smith, Chloe
Maclean, Rachel	Smith, Henry
Main, Mrs Anne	Smith, Royston

Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David

Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Mims Davies and**  
**Kelly Tolhurst**

Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Choqe, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, Colin  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Philip  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evennett, rh David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
 Girvan, Paul  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert

Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Hair, Kirstene  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Jack, Mr Alister  
 James, Margot  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Main, Mrs Anne

*Question accordingly negated.*

### Clause 68

#### REGULATIONS: GENERAL

*Amendment proposed:* 1, page 44, line 35, after “offences,” insert—

“(n) regulations under subsection (1) of this section”.—  
 (*Layla Moran.*)

*This amendment would make regulations made under section 68(1) subject to the affirmative procedure.*

*The House divided:* Ayes 33, Noes 282.

### Division No. 115]

[3.47 pm

#### AYES

Blackman, Kirsty  
 Brake, rh Tom  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Cable, rh Sir Vince  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Davey, rh Sir Edward  
 Day, Martyn  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hosie, Stewart

Jardine, Christine  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Law, Chris  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Thewliss, Alison

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Tim Farron and**  
**Mr Alistair Carmichael**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi

Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, rh Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick

Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Masterton, Paul  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, rh Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Mr Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Mims Davies and**  
**Kelly Tolhurst**

space discovery and technology. We were the third country to successfully operate a satellite and the sixth to launch a satellite into space on our own launch vehicle. We were a founding member of the European Space Agency and a key player in its most exciting and pioneering missions of science and discovery. We pioneered small, low-cost satellite technology that is revolutionising the global space economy, and we continue to develop technical and commercial innovations that will shape the global space economy for decades to come.

Accessing space is one area in which the UK has not yet had an opportunity to excel, as there has been no market to deliver the services on a truly commercial basis—that is until now. The UK today stands at the dawn of a new commercial space age. This presents us with a huge opportunity. Not only has the surge in small satellite launch demand created a global launch market that is forecast to be worth more than £10 billion over the next 10 years, but direct domestic access to space will reduce our dependency on foreign launch services, fix the fracture in the UK's space value chain, enable the development of national expertise and employment opportunities and allow the UK to compete for commercial and strategic opportunities for decades to come.

It has been a great privilege to witness Members of both Houses being enthused and engaged by the Bill and its power to unlock the potential of an entire industry. The approach to the Bill in both Houses has been constructive, creative and collegiate. Indeed, in the best tradition of pioneering space missions, it has inspired collaboration, not contest, at all stages of development and debate. That is testament to the importance of our shared ambition.

I again pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), who played such an important part in the development of the legislation. Is it any wonder that he is the Conservative MP with the highest vote share in the House? I express thanks to both Houses for well-informed debate, careful consideration and willing commitment to work quickly on this important enabling legislation. I also thank all the Committee members and those who have taken part in debates, including today's.

Finally, I pay tribute to an example of true cross-Whitehall collaboration. The Department for Transport, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the UK Space Agency, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Health and Safety Executive have all played an integral part in developing this important legislation.

We are at the dawn of a new commercial space age. Our scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs are ready to pursue this opportunity and to reach higher and farther than they ever have before. The Bill will equip them with the most modern space industry legislation anywhere on Earth and ensure that the UK remains at the forefront of the space economy for generations to come. I commend it to the House.

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Third Reading*

3.59 pm

**Joseph Johnson:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Space Industry Bill is a bold and important Bill that will ensure that the UK space sector is at the vanguard of the new commercial space age that is now under way. The UK has always been at the forefront of

4.3 pm

**Karl Turner:** I thank the Government Front-Bench team for the spirit of co-operation in which the Bill has been handled, and I thank the Minister's officials, who have worked very hard on it as well. I also thank my colleagues in the other place, where the Bill began,

for their very valuable work. They secured a number of important concessions, including the removal of Henry VIII powers, and pressed the Government to introduce a new clause on environmental issues, all of which improved the Bill immensely. It meant that when the Bill came here it was in a much better condition than when it began. I also thank Members who helped to scrutinise the Bill in Committee and those who have made contributions today.

The Minister has said this, as have Members time and again throughout the passage of the Bill: the UK space industry is an important, growing part of our economy. It was valued at £13.7 billion in 2014-15 and supports almost 40,000 jobs. The Bill will establish a licensing regime for spaceports, space flights and satellite launches, which is currently missing from the statute book, and put in place a regulatory framework to allow the further expansion of the industry. For that reason, the Opposition support and welcome the Bill.

4.5 pm

**Carol Monaghan:** First, I would like to thank the Minister, who has moved seamlessly from his previous role into this new role and is not too far away from where he was a few months ago. I also thank the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) for the work he has done.

It is a nice coincidence, I suppose, that SpaceX will be launching the Falcon Heavy rocket from the Kennedy Space Centre in the next couple of hours. It is the largest rocket ever to be launched and could pave the way for travel to Mars. This is the inspirational industry that we all want to be part of, and for that reason there has been great cross-party support for, and consensus around, the Bill.

The idea of spaceports in the UK is potentially exciting, but it needs investment from both the Government and private industry, and I hope that parts of the Bill will draw down some of that investment. I am pleased that many of the potential sites for spaceports are in Scotland, but I am disappointed that the Government chose not to support new clause 4, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). It would have strengthened the Bill and provided the assurances the industry was calling for. I hope that the cap will be put in place, and quickly, to generate future investment possibilities for the industry.

I want to place on the record the three satellite companies currently manufacturing satellites in Glasgow: Clyde Space, Spire and Alba Orbital. Between them, they ensure that Glasgow is second only to San Francisco, worldwide, for the production of CubeSats. We very much want to support this industry, and it would be great to see these Glasgow-built satellites, manufactured very close to the Clyde—they are all within half a mile of the Clyde—actually being launched. “Clyde built” used to be an indication of quality. Let us hope it is for these new spaceships.

The Bill will, of course, need collaboration between the Scottish and UK Governments, as well as cross-party support, which it has had generally, and I look forward to seeing it strengthened after the consultation process that the Minister described this afternoon.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.*

## Backbench Business

### Housing, Planning and the Green Belt

*[Relevant documents: Tenth Report of the Communities and Local Government Committee of Session 2016-17, Capacity in the homebuilding industry, HC 46, and the Government response, Cm 9517.]*

4.8 pm

**Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered housing, planning and the green belt.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for this debate and the Minister for attending. He is a new Minister, so I absolve him of all blame, and I wish him well in his new role. I look forward to working with him constructively on the issues that I am about to raise. I also thank the 33 hon. Members who supported me in obtaining this debate. It demonstrates how much interest there is in the subject.

I have chosen three topics for debate: housing, planning and the green belt. I have long had an interest in these areas—protecting the countryside was one of my motivations for entering Parliament in the first place—but my interest and concern have been heightened by my constituency experiences, so although this debate is not about my area entirely, I will seek to offer examples from Tewkesbury to illustrate my points. I know that other hon. Members will feel free to do similarly.

As with most things in life, we must always seek to find a balance. In this instance, we must ensure that everyone has a decent home to live in, while also recognising that we are not the owners but merely the custodians of the countryside, who have a duty to pass it on intact so that future generations can enjoy all that it has to afford in the same way as past generations. I fear, however, that we are in danger of failing to achieve that balance.

Let me begin with housing. This Government, like previous Governments, have committed themselves to building more houses to address the so-called housing crisis, and, as reflected in the name of the most recent housing White Paper, to fix the “broken housing market”. I want to challenge, or at least put in context, the Government’s characterisation of this crisis. I also want to ask whether it is accepted that what is happening in London, and possibly in the wider south-east, is somewhat different from what is happening in many other parts of the country.

I am concerned about what seems to be a belief that supply is the sole answer to the so-called housing crisis. I believe that there are several factors at play, and I shall say more about that later. I would argue that the issue is not the availability of housing as such, but its affordability. Even with that in mind, however, I am not convinced that increasing supply will substantially drive down costs. I have done some research on the matter. According to evidence given to the Redfern review by Oxford Economics, supply is unlikely to bring house prices down except in the very long term. Even boosting UK housing supply to 310,000 homes per annum brings only a 5% fall in the baseline forecast of house prices.

I think that we need to look beyond the issue of building more houses to what sort of houses we are building. As I will explain later, the planning system is

[*Mr Laurence Robertson*]

producing four and five-bedroom houses, which are often out of the price range of first-time buyers, when what we need are two-bedroom houses, bungalows for older people and housing that is accessible to people with disabilities.

There is no doubt that housing in London is very expensive, and London has that in common with major cities across the world. Hotels are also expensive in London, as they are in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong and many other international cities. However, that is not necessarily because there is a shortage of houses or hotels. It could be said that the UK would be better served not by attracting more and more people to live and work in London, but by spreading the wealth-creating sector and financial opportunities across the country rather than allowing London to act as a magnet. Members should not get me wrong—London is a fantastic city, probably the greatest city in the world, and I want to do nothing to diminish its status—but we should not think that what is happening in London must automatically shape policies across the UK, because sometimes the problems are different.

The Government seem to be describing the housing situation as broken and in crisis on the basis of their analysis of the fall in property ownership among young people, and there has indeed been such a fall. Home ownership among 25 to 34-year-olds has fallen from 59% just over a decade ago to 37% today. Moreover, house building has fallen by 40% since the 1980s. I recognise that there are problems in the housing market, but, again, to reduce them to an issue of supply is an over-simplification.

My analysis suggests that the falls in ownership and house building have in large part been caused by the crash in 2007-08 and the financial fallout from it. Before 2007, we were living in an artificial financial boom. Personal debt was increasing, and some companies were offering applicants mortgages that were worth up to 125% of the value of the houses that they were seeking to buy. Self-certification of income also still existed. All that changed with the crash. Mortgage applicants then had to provide documentary evidence of income, and, while the fall in interest rates should have helped buyers, the affordability of a house was assessed not at the prevailing mortgage rate at the time, but at an assumed rate that would be reached should interest rates be increased.

For example, at the moment the standard mortgage rate is 4.5% and there are many better offers than that available, but applicants are assessed on the basis of whether they could afford to pay their mortgages if rates reached 6% or 6.5%. As was the case 40 years ago, significant deposits are now required by lenders before they will release the mortgage. That has brought about a very significant change.

I am not saying that the Government's insistence on stronger capital bases for banks is a bad thing; nor is such a requirement a tightening up of lending practice. What I am saying is that it has had a significant impact on the ability of young people to buy their first houses. The fall in ownership, particularly among young people, and the fall in the number of new constructions did not come about because of a change in planning guidance in 2007-08, because there was no such change. These falls came about because of the change in the financial

position of banks and building societies. We therefore have to be careful that we do not respond to a change in lending practice with an easing of planning regulation.

We also need to recognise that at the same time as describing the housing market as in crisis and broken, the Government have set up an inquiry into why developers land bank, which is something of a contradictory position. Estimates suggest that 320,000 homes granted planning permission over the past five years have not been built. In my constituency, I have seen developers having to obtain an extension to their planning permission because they have reached the end of the statutory five-year period before starting to build. Developers will not deny themselves the profits that would come from building on land for which they have planning permission without good reason, so perhaps we ought to consider that they might be failing to develop the land because there is not quite the demand for housing in some areas that is assumed.

The determination to build ever more houses has led to some councils being persuaded that they need to build on the green belt to meet what is assumed to be their assessed housing need. That points to a confusion and contradiction in green-belt policy. The Government's planning guidance states that the green belt should not be developed other than in "exceptional circumstances", yet it fails to describe what constitutes "exceptional circumstances". The housing White Paper goes on to say:

"Green Belt boundaries should be amended only in exceptional circumstances when local authorities can demonstrate that they have fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting their identified housing requirements."

However, crucially for the point I am making, planning guidance also says:

"Unmet housing need...is unlikely to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harm to constitute the 'very special circumstances' justifying inappropriate development on a site within the Green Belt."

Planning guidance is going around in circles, because in effect it says that the green belt should not be built on unless nowhere else can be found to build the houses, but that unmet housing need is unlikely to outweigh harm to the green belt in importance.

This confusion and contradiction in planning guidance, along with the assumption that we have a housing crisis across the whole country, has led to proposals to build around 10,000 houses in my constituency on green-belt land, including 1,000 on land which floods. Indeed, in 2014 the then Prime Minister David Cameron visited my area to look at those very fields that were flooded, as well as the roads and some houses. I can assure the House that he did not visit to look at dry, green fields, yet permission has been granted, on appeal, to build on that very land.

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** I apologise for arriving a little late for this debate; I was talking about the Cotswolds national park, which I know is close to the hon. Gentleman's heart. He will be aware that, under the Government's new methodology for housing needs, Tewkesbury is expected to take an additional 21% increase and Stroud a 39% increase. Does he share my concern? I do not know where this methodology has come from or what the implications are, but it will cause a lot more grief in the Stroud and Tewkesbury areas.

**Mr Robertson:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I am hoping that the housing White Paper, to which I will return in a minute, will attempt to clarify matters. As he will be aware, a lot of planning applications are assessed against the five-year land supply, particularly on appeal, but there is no methodology for calculating that five-year land supply. That is another problem in the planning system that I hope the Government will be able to correct.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, with whom I share a local authority, for giving way. He is making a good point: this is a regional problem. Figures from the Office for National Statistics on household growth in Gloucestershire show that our local planning authorities are building, or planning to build, enough houses to cope with the population growth. There is a significant problem in London and the south-east, but it is not consistent across the UK. My hon. Friend makes that point very well.

**Mr Robertson:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and Gloucestershire neighbour. That is exactly the point that I was seeking to make.

Why are there so many proposals to build houses on the green belt, particularly in my area? In the joint core strategy that is being drawn up by the Tewkesbury, Cheltenham and Gloucester planning authorities, Tewkesbury is looking to cover the unmet need of Cheltenham and Gloucester. However, contrary to planning guidance, the green belt is being compromised to satisfy the undoubted duty to co-operate, and this is creating confusion.

Why is Tewkesbury Borough Council doing this? It is because it feels that it must, and I have some sympathy with its position when I read the details of the planning inspector's report, which again illustrates anomalies in the planning guidance. The inspector states in her report:

"Taking full account of constraints and the outcomes of cross-border exploration, removal of land from the green belt is needed, so far as is justified, to contribute to housing provision and the five-year supply".

She goes on to say:

"I find that the adverse impacts of removing land from the green belt would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of contributing towards housing and other development needs".

Here we see clear evidence of the confusion in the planning guidance with regard to protection of the green belt. The inspector is insisting on building on the green belt and on the floodplain to meet housing numbers, yet the planning guidance clearly states that unmet housing need is unlikely to outweigh harm to the green belt in importance. I am aware that local planning authorities have the right to change the designation of the green belt at the plan-making stage, but that is not the point. The point is that there is a contradiction in the planning guidance.

I am aware that the Government have introduced a White Paper to consider the housing crisis and the broken housing market, but having read through it, I do not think that it is likely to address the problems of the market or the inconsistencies, contradictions and confusions in the planning system. Nor do I think that it will restore a sense of democracy to the planning process.

Indeed, the wishes of a significant proportion of my constituents have been completely disregarded in the outcome of this process. We often hear the Government referring to the importance of local decision making, but the existence of the Planning Inspectorate makes a mockery of that, and does not help us to provide the houses that we need.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend have the same problem that we have in Wokingham and west Berkshire, where a large number of planning permissions are granted but the builders do not build enough homes? On appeal, extra homes are then granted in places that do not fit in with the local plan or the infrastructure provisions.

**Mr Robertson:** I am not familiar with the situation in my right hon. Friend's area, but I know that the appeals system does not seem to work to the benefit of local communities.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's description of his constituency, and it reminds me of my own, which is hemmed in by green belt and also has floodplains. I entirely agree that there is a lack of democracy in the system. Local residents feel that they have no say over wide patches of changes to their villages and towns, and the local authorities feel compelled to carry out actions against the wishes of their own constituents. I commend the hon. Gentleman for making that point; he is entirely right.

**Mr Robertson:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention, and I welcome her support.

Guidance on the provision of affordable housing requires councils to assess the need based on local circumstances, but such housing is not being delivered in practice. The housing White Paper outlines that the Government intend to amend the policy framework to introduce a clear policy expectation that housing sites deliver a minimum of 10% affordable homes, but that is not sufficient to address the issues that the planning system is failing to sort out, particularly for first-time buyers. As I see it, it will still be producing the wrong types of housing—perhaps large three-bedroom houses, but also four and five-bedroom houses—when many areas, including my own, need affordable two-bedroom houses. Such homes are more likely to be within the price range of younger people, thereby addressing the problem that the Government identified in the first place: a fall in ownership among young people.

**John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): In support of the hon. Gentleman's argument, does he think it significant that the Campaign to Protect Rural England estimates that just over 10% of all the houses built on the green belt since 2009 are actually affordable?

**Mr Robertson:** I was not aware of that figure, so I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention.

I was speaking about home ownership among young people, but the provision of two-bedroom houses would also help older people who are perhaps looking to downsize after retirement, which would free up larger houses. Yet that is not happening at the moment.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the biggest problems is that developers can get out of their obligation to build affordable homes by using viability studies? They can submit a planning application, pick the executive homes that they want to build and then, halfway through, they can produce viability studies and say, “Whoops! We cannot afford to build affordable homes.” Will the hon. Gentleman call on his Government to do something about this shambles?

**Mr Robertson:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. The Minister is here and listening to all these points, which I am pleased to say are consistent with my speech. However, I am being glared at by Madam Deputy Speaker because I have spoken for longer than I had intended, so I will wind up my remarks.

I will conclude with the following suggestions. The Government should accept that London’s housing issues are not the same as those facing the rest of the country, that affordability and a change in lending practice is a significant factor in falling ownership levels among young people and that merely increasing the supply of houses will not address that. We need to ensure that more affordable houses are built for both younger and older people. Planning guidance for green-belt land is confused and needs clarifying. Decisions by the Planning Inspectorate often do not reflect Government policy or planning guidance, and its existence is an affront to democracy in itself. The housing White Paper needs revisiting to ensure that we build the right houses in the right places to give the younger generation a real prospect of being homeowners, while also protecting the countryside. Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for the time today, and I look forward to hearing what other right hon. and hon. Members and the Minister have to say.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. The hon. Gentleman picked up on my hint. As Members can see, many people want to speak, so I will start off by introducing an eight-minute time limit.

4.28 pm

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): I want to focus on my constituency and to raise the issue of how the Government keep sending mixed messages about what has priority in local plans, how many houses should be built and the amount of business that should be put in place.

I live and was born and brought up in the Halton area. Halton Borough Council is putting out a local plan for public consultation. I and many of my constituents do not agree with it, but the council tells me that, given the Government’s current rulebook—the national policy planning framework—it is impossible for the local plan to meet the NPPF requirements without going into the green belt. If the Government are serious about their commitment to protecting the green belt and delivering sustainable growth, they need to provide funding for infrastructure—which they do not; they have a fund, but I have not seen anything coming through in any significant numbers in Halton—for land assembly and for remediation. Halton has also been told that it has to consider economic growth, but how can it do that if it does not have enough brownfield land? So the Government

force it to use the green belt. Should Halton be using the green belt? Is that an exceptional reason to do that? The Government talk about exceptional circumstances. Paragraph 79 of the NPPF says:

“The government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.”

That is what most of my constituents feel about their great green belt.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that urban sprawl happens not only beyond town boundaries but within towns, where green space may be a green lung within a built-up area?

**Derek Twigg:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, and that is the situation in Halton, where we are losing the green belt within the town while our boundary is being pushed closer to neighbouring authorities.

**John Penrose** (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has sketched out two alternatives: brownfield sites or urban sprawl. Does he accept there is a third alternative, which is to go for greater density within towns and cities? Greater density uses existing infrastructure far better and, provided it is done within planning and design codes, can be a great deal more acceptable to local people in gaining local consent for development.

**Derek Twigg:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but it is for local authorities to decide on density. It is also important that people have decent-sized gardens. One side effect of having greater density is the lack of gardens, or a reduction in their size.

Halton is currently considering its local plan. The current planning policy states that it must plan to meet its objectively assessed need, which is calculated at 460 new homes net a year during the life of the plan. The Government need to understand that Halton is a special case. The borough has significant constraints in the form of COMAH sites—control of major accident hazards—and flood risk. The borough is hard against its green-belt boundaries, and all brownfield sites in Halton are allocated to housing or employment. There is only green space and green belt left, apart from 60 hectares of land that is too contaminated to be used for either housing or employment. Will the Government assist Halton with funding to decontaminate that land, rather than force us to use the green belt?

The “Planning for the right homes in the right places” consultation states:

“The housing White Paper contained a number of proposals to reform planning to achieve these objectives. It reinforced the central role of local and neighbourhood plans in the planning system, so that local planning authorities and local communities retain control of where development should...go.”

In his letter to MPs on 7 June 2016, the Minister’s predecessor, the right hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), said:

“The Framework makes it clear that inappropriate development may be allowed only where very special circumstances exist, and that Green Belt boundaries should be adjusted only in exceptional circumstances—”

is it an exceptional circumstance that we have no land left on which to build unless we build on the green belt?—

“through the Local Plan process and with the support of local people.”

That is the important point. Do local people have the final say, or have the Government put some other consideration in the framework and advice that says differently?

Local people do not want the green belt to be built on, so they want to retain control of where development should or should not go. Halton has run out of land to allocate for housing, yet there is still this requirement to maintain a continuous five-year supply of housing land to meet the housing delivery test.

In his answer to my parliamentary question this week, the Minister said there

“is not a local housing target.”

The fact is that no inspector in his Department would allow any council to say, “We are not going to build any housing because we have no land left other than green belt.” The Minister can tell me that is not true and that the inspector will not impose it. I understand there is not a target, but inspectors will be working to a very clear policy framework. I am interested in what he has to say about that. Many local authorities have much more green belt than Halton. Surely there is a balance to be struck for an area such as Halton, which has urban developed land taking up the great majority of space.

Halton was really where the chemicals industry was born. It was a huge area for that industry, which provided many jobs. That was important, but the industry left a huge legacy of contaminated land in Halton. Few local authorities will have to deal with the scale of pollution that Halton Borough Council has faced. It has done a good job since 1974 in dealing with that legacy and ensuring that a lot of that land has come back into some use, but the council does not have the funds to remediate the contaminated land that is left and the Government must recognise that in their future guidance.

If things continue to follow the same path, we will have little green belt left for future generations to enjoy in my constituency. As we know, such land is very important in terms of enjoyment, exercise, mental health and so on. It is therefore very important that urbanised areas such as Halton have these spaces. I know that the new guidance is being worked on and the first stage of it will be coming out in the spring, but the Minister must answer what the defining factor is for our local authority and for our local community, who has the final say and what is the strongest weight to give to a particular argument. He and his Department, in the guidance, have consistently given out mixed messages about what should be taken into consideration, but they do not make it clear what should be given the greatest weight. Should it be what is important to the local community and what they want, or is it the guidance that the Government have sent out for the inspectors to deal with? We do not want inspectors coming to Halton and saying that, because the council has not done what they think it should have done, it should go back and reconsider or even that it should have powers taken away from it. The Minister really needs to address that.

My constituents do not want green belt land to be built on. We have suffered a massive legacy of pollution and contaminated land. Our council has worked hard

to deal with that, but we are entitled to enjoy our green space and our green belt in Halton as much as anyone anywhere else is.

I wish to mention one final thing, which is the leasehold issue. A number of my constituents have faced a situation where developers have left them with leaseholds that cost them an awful lot of money. The Government say they are going to bring forward some plans to deal with that, but what are they going to do for those people who have already had the problem and have the legacy of it? I hope the Government will make sure they do this retrospectively and help the people who have been conned by the developers, in that they have been charged very high rates for their leasehold. I hope the Government will see to that.

In conclusion, it is very important that the Minister listens to what Halton is saying. I am happy to meet him so that he can see what the specific challenges are in Halton, which many other authorities will have faced.

4.37 pm

**Nick Boles** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): This is the first time I rise to contribute to a debate since my recovery from cancer and my return to active duty. I hope that you will therefore forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I divert for a moment to thank right hon. and hon. Members of the House, from all parts and all parties, for their kindness in the time I was ill. You know all too well, Madam Deputy Speaker, that Whips can sometimes come in for a bit of a bad rap, but I would just like to put on record the unstinting support that our Whips Office gave me while I was ill. In particular, I wish to single out my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Julian Smith), who, as Deputy Chief Whip, was constantly inquiring after my health and making sure I had everything I needed, and my current Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer), whom I hope will always be my Whip and my friend.

I need to warn the Whips Office that, like many people who recover from a serious illness, I have returned a slightly different man, with a slightly different perspective. I have returned with a determination no longer to draw a veil over awkward truths and no longer to avoid thinking clearly and speaking openly about the mistakes we have made. The truth is that, for 20 years, Governments of all parties and politicians of all stripes have failed to build enough new homes to meet the housing needs of our fellow citizens. We have done that even though almost every single one of us in this House knows that happy feeling of living in a home that we own. In all our constituencies, for huge numbers of the people we represent, the dream of home ownership has turned into a tantalising mirage—a nightmare which they can never hope to get out of. We have failed through a combination of cowardice, complacency, laziness and incomprehension.

The roots of this problem lie in a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of our housing market and house building industry. We talk of them as if it were a free market and all the problems that emanate from it are a result of free market operation, but that is not the case. This is a market in which the Government have made the most extraordinary intervention. Back in the 1930s, the house building market used to generate, in a country with a much smaller population, well over 300,000 homes every year. That was a free market,

[*Nick Boles*]

but the problem was that it led to unstoppable urban sprawl, as cities reached out into the countryside in a never-ending way.

As a result, as a Parliament and as a people we decided to introduce the Town and Country Planning Act 1932 to constrain that sprawl and introduce some order into the development process. That was an extraordinary intervention. We went from a situation in which someone could buy a plot of land, put up a few homes and sell them, to a situation in which the right to develop land was nationalised. The landowner has no innate right to build anything on their land. They have to apply to the Government for permission. That is an intervention that I support. I believe that the British people were entirely within their rights—as my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) is entirely within his rights—to want to defend the precious English countryside, but we need to acknowledge the effect of that intervention and be willing to embrace the measures to ensure that we nevertheless build enough homes for our people.

In France, they have a planning system, yet every single year they build 300,000 or 400,000 homes and they have very much less in the way of house-price inflation than we do. In Germany, they have a planning system, and every single year, routinely, they build 300,000 or 400,000 units, and they too have managed to avoid the UK's curse: house-price inflation.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): It is fantastic to see my hon. Friend back in his place, making his customary important points. Does he accept that in Cherwell we too have a planning system, and we are still able to build three houses a day on average, because of positive local leadership? We just have to work harder to make sure that we have the infrastructure to back that up.

**Nick Boles:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. The new Minister for Housing, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), will discover, as I did when I was Planning Minister in the same Department, that Cherwell is one of the most progressive authorities on house building and sets an example that many other authorities could do well to study.

When we have made an intervention of the kind we have by nationalising the right to build and introducing a planning system, we need to follow through with the kinds of interventions that the French and the Germans allow themselves, to ensure that land prices do not become the constant fuel of ever-rising house prices, that major house builders are not in the business of eking out their supply as slowly as possible to keep prices as high as possible and that every year we build enough truly affordable housing units—housing that people on average and below-average incomes can afford to rent or buy. That is something that is achieved in Germany and France, and it is something that we comprehensively fail to do.

There will be some on these Benches of the more pure free market cast of mind who would rather that we scrap our planning controls and revert to a system of the 1930s. If we were to do that, it is true that the number of units that we would build every year would

go up, that house prices would fall and that more people would be able to own their own homes. It is also true that we would have cities merging with one another and that we would lose huge swathes of precious English countryside, and I simply do not believe that the British people would wear it. The alternative therefore is for this party in government, which believes in the free market and in free enterprise, nevertheless to grasp that further state intervention is necessary if we are to have a house building industry that delivers enough homes for our citizens.

I know that there will be other hon. Members who would like to say more about some of these ideas, but the key interventions that we need to make are these. We need to give ourselves the power to acquire land at a price that is fair to the community as well as to the landowner. Why should landowners benefit from the fluke that gives them planning permission to build on their land when none of their neighbours receives it? Why should the taxpayer bear the cost of the infrastructure—the roads, the sewerage and the schools—that makes land developable in the first place? We need to revert to the situation that led to Milton Keynes and the other new towns, where we were able to acquire the land at a reasonable price, a small multiple of its agricultural land value, and then use the uplift in that land value to fund the infrastructure that the community needs.

We also need to intervene with major house builders to ensure that they build out the sites with planning permission on the schedule that they agreed with the planning authority. My suggestion for how we enforce this is to ask them to offer any sites that they had refused to build out to any other house builder to build on. This is such an important subject, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I hope to return to it in future, but I thank you for your time.

4.47 pm

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), although I did not agree with everything he said. He and I know each other very well, and it is good to see him back in the House.

We constantly hear the same lines about the Government promising to fix the housing market, yet after their seven years in government, it is no secret that we still have an enormous housing crisis in this country. Last year, the number of affordable homes built in this country fell to the lowest level in 24 years.

New policies introduced by this Government have weakened the previous Labour Government's brownfield-first policy. In fact, under this Government, as of July 2017, 425,000 homes were planned to be built on green-belt land. That represents the biggest yearly increase in proposed development on green-belt land for two decades. To add insult to injury, since 2009, only 16% of houses built on green-belt land outside local plans were deemed affordable.

It is worth pointing out that under the previous Labour Government, 2 million more homes were built and we had 1 million more householders owning their own homes, but since 2010, under this Government, the number of homeowners aged under 45 has fallen by 900,000. There was also the biggest investment in social housing for a generation. On average, Labour councils have built around 50% more homes than Tory councils since 2010.

It is clear that the Government's Housing and Planning Act 2016 fails to get to grips with the crisis of home ownership. It is simply no good trying to twist this around and placing the blame on those in local government. If that were true, Coventry's local plan would not have been approved by this Government.

There are issues in my constituency, particularly in the Kings Hill and the Cromwell Lane areas of Coventry, and I have raised those issues many times. In fact, the situation is now so bad, and there is such serious concern, that a new residents association has been formed in the Westwood ward, which covers those areas. The Government now say that they believe that there is a better way to calculate housing numbers. According to the new plans, even more homes will need to be built each year, but those plans are based on incorrect Government numbers. Many residents groups in my constituency have protested against these developments, and I have spoken in defence of the Kings Hill area for many years. The Government seek to provide different formulas and figures. The current figures for Coventry make huge assumptions about students, but the idea that they all stay and live in Coventry after university is simply not true.

Nationally, the big four developers account for more than 75% of the plots with planning permission, but getting developers building on existing sites is far more important than allocating them yet more land. There need to be firmer consequences for developers that are land banking, so that we ensure that their existing commitments are met before further land is released. Incentives should be introduced to put an end to a slow build-out rates and developers must start building the homes that communities need. The Government say that they listen to communities, but the communities are overruled, as has happened in the Kings Hill area of Coventry that I just mentioned.

Brownfield sites have the potential to deliver more than 1 million homes, so the Government need to reassess the possibilities that they offer. That is crucial, because 70% of the housing proposed for land to be released from the green belt will be unaffordable for local communities. The Government must understand that this is about not only the sheer number of houses being built, but the types of those houses. This needs to happen urgently, so that we can end the housing crisis and give this generation the homes that they deserve.

I have asked the Minister to meet me on two or three occasions, but those meetings have been postponed. I hope that, this time, the Minister will meet me and some of the residents from the areas I have mentioned.

4.52 pm

**Nick Herbert** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Yesterday I was at a planning inquiry in my constituency. It should have been a situation in which a planning inspector signed off a neighbourhood plan produced by a village, but the process has in fact been stopped because of incompatibility with the local plan. It has to be said that the neighbourhood plan had not started quickly enough; nevertheless, it has been stopped.

In response to views expressed by the planning inspector, Mid Sussex District Council has proposed a 500-house settlement to the north of the village of Hassocks. The cumulative effect of that new development and others would be to increase the size of the village by a third. There are huge local concerns about the adequacy of

infrastructure, the decision to locate the settlement at the proposed site, the loss of countryside, the closure of a green space between two villages and so on, but the important point is that the parish council was preparing its neighbourhood plan, and it was proposing an increase in the number of houses. Neighbourhood plans have delivered more houses than expected. The parish council proposed a limited number of houses in that location, but 500 was completely out of kilter with the number it expected to produce, and the site of the proposed new settlement is not in the location that the parish council wanted.

During the inquiry, a huge number of members of the public were listening to the evidence given by not only elected representatives, but a vast array of QCs representing an equally vast array of house builders. Members of the public were not allowed to speak, but every time they just said, "Hear, hear," or disagreed with a point in the way in which polite members of the public in West Sussex do, they were told to be quiet. They were silenced. A reform that was introduced under the Localism Act 2011 and that was designed to empower local communities—giving them the decision about where housing should be located—has suddenly regressed to the old-fashioned planning by appeal process, with decisions taken by the planning inspector and the public literally silenced. I suggest that we need to hold faith with the principle of giving communities more control over where housing goes.

In reality, more housing than expected was produced by the process of neighbourhood planning. I think that those on all sides can agree with the principles of empowerment, of taking responsibility and of putting decision making into the hands of the local community. Upsetting neighbourhood plans undermines those principles and this very powerful reform.

We should understand why this has happened: developers have been gaming the system, and continue to do so. Developers, by not using planning permissions, have driven down the five-year land supply so that we have a planning free-for-all whereas we should have a planned system. Developers have conspired—I use that word advisedly—in Mid Sussex, as they have in other districts in my constituency, to delay putting local plans in place so that they can maintain that free-for-all, yet cynically they have not built.

**Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): My right hon. Friend refers to the power of the local voice. I am sorry that my voice has gone a little, but I will still speak up for local people. That local voice needs to be heard in planning. My area falls within the Stockport local plan area, but that, in turn, falls under the Greater Manchester spatial framework. For four years, one of my villages has been trying to set up its own neighbourhood plan. The community has done a lot of work, but it is now worried about how its neighbourhood plan will fit in, as two other plans are being put in place. There were indications in "Planning for the right homes in the right places" that this would be addressed through a different methodology. Does he agree that we need to keep that approach?

**Nick Herbert:** Where possible, we need to respect neighbourhood plans. Of course the local planning authority retains the position of a strategic planning

[Nick Herbert]

authority, but we should not allow developers to bust neighbourhood plans by cynical means, which is what has been happening.

It is important to note that the housing that is now being built in West Sussex is far in excess of the level that was envisaged 12 years ago, when I was first elected to the House. The objectively assessed need for local authorities is now 61% higher than it was under Gordon Brown's draft south-east plan, and it will be double that when the Government bring in the new housing need figures. New houses are being built. However, it is important that permissions actually translate into new homes.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) back to his place. I agreed with almost everything that he said. We can all agree about the importance of building more houses. He gave us his framing of the fundamental problem, and I agree that returning to the free market is not the answer, and nor is saying that we should hold to the current system, which is clearly not delivering. Somewhere in the middle, we have to identify a more radical reform that will allow us, as he suggested, to capture the uplift in the value of land between what it would be as ordinary land with an agricultural market value, and land with development potential, which suddenly becomes worth millions or tens of millions of pounds per acre. We have to think hard about how we do that.

I want to deliver a warning. Putting into the hands of local authorities powers of compulsory purchase that give them the ability to confiscate land at not the market value, but an assessed value that is far lower, might indeed have the effect that my hon. Friend suggests. While we must explore such ideas, that might also create wholesale property blight across the country, inconveniencing not just the owners of agricultural land, but communities more widely. I look at the effect of a proposed new town in my constituency, which is in the same district of Mid Sussex, but also falls into Horsham district. Neither local authority wants that, but it has been relentlessly promoted by a developer that does not even have an options on the land, against the wishes of the local community and the local councils. That has created an enormous blight on a large swathe of this part of Mid Sussex, because people are fearful that a new town might come and therefore the value of their properties is affected.

If we are to investigate such a reform, we have to be very careful to draw a distinction between previous powers exercised by the Government in relation to compulsory purchase for new towns such as Milton Keynes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford set out, and the idea that we could somehow translate those powers to local authorities in a way that was not carefully constrained. That needs much more careful thinking, but it is undoubtedly the germ of an important idea.

I agree with my hon. Friend that we will need new thinking if we are to increase supply in the way that is necessary. We are not France or Germany. We have a much smaller country, and there are huge pressures on infrastructure, but reform might help to deliver infrastructure for local communities.

We need to produce more affordable housing, but we should try to apply the principles we latched on to a few years ago with the Localism Act 2011, through which

we gave communities the power to decide where they wanted housing and the responsibility to exercise that power. That yielded great results, because it meant that communities that had previously said no to developments started saying yes in a very positive way. We should be careful about principles that rely on such state intervention, control or indeed confiscation that they would be anathema to the public and many Conservative Members.

5.1 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The profits of the top five UK house builders have risen by 388% in the last five years, sometimes at the expense of the people we are trying to help on to the housing ladder. One area in which developers' profits have come first is commuted sums for grounds maintenance and other communal services. It seems that the idea of a developer paying the local authority a commuted sum to cut the grass and maintain common parts has had its day, and I am not clear whether the blame for that lies with local authorities asking for too much money, or developers not being prepared to cough up the funds in advance. I suspect they would blame each other.

The net effect is that more and more homeowners are having to pay twice for the maintenance of open spaces: once through a management fee; and once through their council tax. Of course, council tax pays for a lot of things, but something as visible and obvious as grounds maintenance leads people to ask why they face a double whammy. My suspicion is that if developers can save themselves half a million pounds, they have a big temptation to cash that and let the customer pay further down the line.

Not only is there a double payment, but the system is inefficient and lacks accountability. If the grass does not get cut on the verges in most parts of my constituency, either a local councillor or I will hear about it and respond, but it is not so easy to get a response when dealing with a private company.

The most high-profile example of how developers shift costs on to consumers is the leasehold scandal. How much have developers pocketed over recent years by selling the freeholds for new estates to investment companies? I hope the message is now getting through to them that that racket has to stop and that they will be ultimately be responsible for their misdemeanours. I am pleased that Ministers have indicated a willingness to act, although I am sure that they are aware of the frustration felt by many who are trapped in unsellable homes, for whom the Law Commission report feels like a lifetime away.

I know that developers have effectively been put on notice that they should not sell any more houses on a leasehold basis, but there are reports that that is still happening. Can the Government issue supplementary planning guidance to local authorities to say that selling properties on a leasehold basis unnecessarily would be a reasonable ground for refusing planning permission?

Members will have heard countless stories about leasehold and an industry that is out of control. Now is not the time to recount those, but suffice it to say that although there are some positive examples of responsible developers, I have little confidence overall that the industry has the right moral structures in place to deliver the houses that we so desperately need. We need answers to how these feudalistic practices were allowed to start in the first place.

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): One of my constituents suggested to me that breaking up some of the bigger house builders might improve competition in the market, deliver a better deal for people buying homes and enable us to deliver more homes. I would be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's views about that suggestion.

**Justin Madders:** That is an interesting point. Over recent years, the number of developers has contracted. The sums involved and the years of advance planning needed to build some of these developments tend to favour the bigger builders. I am not sure how we would go about achieving that, but it needs to be looked at.

The Communities and Local Government Committee should also consider this issue because developers—big and small—must explain how their duping of customers was allowed to start in the first place, how much profit they have made from this scam, who drew up the leases that nobody will now sign, how many properties were made leasehold needlessly, what role lenders and solicitors played in allowing through leases that nobody will now sign, and exactly who the beneficiaries of these leases are? Until we know the answers to these questions, we cannot be sure that the new homes we need will be owned with no strings attached by the people who buy them.

I want to say a few words about enforcement, because the rules of the planning system have value only if they can be effectively enforced. The significant funding cuts that local authorities have experienced in recent years are bound to have had an impact on the number and extent of enforcement activities that a council can undertake.

The classic example is the Mostyn House development in Parkgate in my constituency. Originally, the site was a boarding school in a listed building, but once the school ceased, the site was certainly an attractive one for developers to consider—and so they did. The site is now an impressive mix of new builds and apartments woven into the fabric of the old school, but it suffers from one major disadvantage. Despite some people having lived there for over four years, there is still no planning permission in place.

The reason for that is that revised plans were submitted halfway through the redevelopment, and despite the best efforts of the local authority enforcement officers, the developer, P. J. Livesey, constantly drags its heels, with the result that there is a list of outstanding works as long as your arm. From what I understand, the developer has a similar patchy record elsewhere in the country, but it seems to be able to get away with it, because there just is no capacity to follow through enforcement consistently.

As Mostyn House is a listed building, it is a pretty technical job to keep on top of it all. Fortunately, however, some of the residents have a surveying background, so they have been meticulous in logging the issues. Despite that, P. J. Livesey has still not met the required standards, and I wonder where we would be if we did not have such proactive and knowledgeable residents.

What about bringing roads up to an acceptable standard, so that they can be adopted by a local authority? There is an estate in my constituency that people started moving into almost a decade ago, and the developer—in this case, Bellway—still has not done the necessary works that would enable the local authority to adopt the roads. I do not blame the local authority. It has set out what needs to be done, but it does not have the

resources or the time to constantly chase the developer, which has now sold the homes and moved on. What is the incentive for the developer to go back and complete the work it should have done?

I am pleased to say that, after many years of stagnation, there is a significant amount of house building in my constituency, particularly on brownfield sites, but very little of that housing is affordable. That is because the permissions were all granted some time ago, and the developers used the coalition Government's rules on viability assessments to argue that it was not cost-effective for them to keep to their affordable housing obligations on individual sites. They plead poverty as they tell us that the requirement to build affordable homes means they cannot maintain their 20% profit margins.

As a result, no affordable housing is currently being built on just about every development site. Most developers sought release from their obligations three or four years ago, and many have only started building in the past six to 12 months, so it is quite clear that the affordable housing requirements were not stopping developments from proceeding. There is more than a suspicion that developers have played the system to maximise profit and had no intention of proceeding with their buildings previously. We have had empty sites for three or four years longer than needed, and an opportunity to build much-needed affordable housing has been lost.

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): It should come as no surprise to anyone that private sector house builders build when—and only when—it is sufficiently profitable to do so. That ought to be an axiom, and I am sure the hon. Gentleman agrees with that. Does he therefore agree that part of the solution ought to be to provide a much wider range of genuine choice to potential consumers—people who want somewhere to live in the affordable space and homeless people, as well as those in the purchasing market—so that private sector developers cannot exercise an oligopoly, as they currently do?

**Justin Madders:** That is an interesting point. At the moment, developers will build at the time that suits them best and will build the types of property that suit them best, but that is not necessarily what suits the demand best. That is something I hear regularly in my surgery, and it is probably still the No. 1 issue raised there. I am pleased that my local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, is now building some council housing, because there is huge demand for it in my constituency. This is the first it has built for nearly 40 years, although, unfortunately, that has taken the borrowing limits under the housing revenue account to the limit, so we need that cap to be lifted.

Most disappointingly, once those properties are built, we will still have less council housing in my constituency than we did a couple of years ago. That is due to the huge increase in right to buy applications in recent times—who can blame people for taking advantage of 70% discounts?—but that policy is short term in the extreme. It is the Government's stated aim that every council property sold under right to buy should be replaced, but the reality is that that one-for-one replacement is actually running at a rate of about one replacement for every five properties sold.

Is there any wonder? Recently, a three-bedroom semi in my constituency was sold under right to buy for £27,000, and do not forget that the council will get only

[Justin Madders]

a third of that money to replace the house it has just lost. The average cost of a semi-detached house in my constituency is about £148,000, so Members can do the maths and see that this policy is completely unrealistic and needs to be changed.

To conclude—a number of Members have talked along these lines today—I would like much greater political direction and oversight over the house building industry. After all, those involved are the people who will build the homes that we all need. At the moment, they quite understandably organise their affairs to maximise their profits, but housing is part of our infrastructure and a roof over our head is a fundamental right. We cannot just rely on the market unfettered to deliver that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Due to the number of Members who wish to speak, the time limit will have to drop to six minutes. Hopefully, we will not have to drop it again.

5.11 pm

**Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) in this important debate.

It is fast becoming a cliché to talk of a broken housing market and building for the future, but those rather trite phrases disguise both the difficult problem that we have in not having built enough homes for some time and the significant challenges that remain for the house building industry.

I want to make it clear that I am not against building and development. We of course need to provide new homes to meet the housing shortage, but that should be done in a way that is sensitive to the local environment and sensitive to the wishes of local communities, which in my assessment has hitherto been lacking.

I shall confine my remarks to the specific consideration of housing and green belt policy in Greater Manchester, but the principles could apply equally to other parts of the country.

The pithily titled Greater Manchester spatial framework, commonly known as the GMSF, is the Greater Manchester combined authority's land management plan for housing, commercial and industrial use over the next 20 years. It will have a profound effect on the shape and character of local communities and will impact on the lives of many thousands of families for generations to come.

I, and others, have serious reservations about the draft GMSF in terms of the methodology for calculating overall housing targets, the scale on which it proposes to release swathes of green belt for housing development, the lack of sensitivity and awareness it displays towards the character of existing communities and the scant regard to additional infrastructure required to support new, large-scale housing developments.

**Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that the target population increase in GMSF ought to be wholly reconsidered, especially in the light of Brexit, whereby we will have more control over our borders?

**Mr Wragg:** There are many flaws in the statistical methodology of the GMSF that I would like to unpack, but unfortunately perhaps, or fortunately for the House, I do not have the minutes in which to do so. However, my hon. Friend is spot on.

Further to that, to give an example, the draft framework proposed that 4,900 hectares of Greater Manchester's green-belt land be built on, representing a net loss of 8% of green-belt land across the area. In my constituency, proposals included a development of 4,000 homes on fields around the village of High Lane—essentially trebling the size of that village, with little regard for the burden of increased traffic on the road network and the increased pressures on public services.

**Mary Robinson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for giving way. I appreciate the points he is making, particularly about the green belt, because, as he knows, in my constituency 8,100 homes are planned to be built on the green belt. That is not sustainable or wanted, which is why more than 3,000 people signed my petition on that very point, which I presented to the House.

**Mr Wragg:** The constituents of Cheadle have a doughty campaigner in my hon. Friend. We think we have it bad in the Hazel Grove constituency with the proposals for 4,000 homes. The figure is more than double that in Cheadle, which is beyond the pale. Her constituents are fortunate to have such a vigorous representative in this House.

As my hon. Friend alluded to, in the last Parliament we presented petitions to the House on behalf of thousands of our constituents who are opposed to the massive scale of development on green-belt land and urge instead the development of brownfield sites. I also had the pleasure of introducing a Westminster Hall debate on the matter, which was well attended by colleagues from all parts of the House, including the current Mayor of Greater Manchester. That demonstrated the concerns over the spatial framework right across the region.

Since then, the combined authority has undertaken a public consultation on the Greater Manchester spatial framework, which received an astonishing 27,000 responses. While many of those recognised the need for new housing, concern about the allocation of green-belt land for that development was the single biggest issue raised in the consultation. Concerns over the environment and infrastructure were also raised. The massive response to the draft framework rightly prompted a fundamental rethink of the plan. Work is under way on a second version, which is due to be published in June 2018 and will be subject to a further 12-week consultation. The grass is long on the green belt in my constituency, but I hope that the combined authority have not put the plan into the long grass.

While we await the second draft of the GMSF, I have a few suggestions that might make the revised plan more acceptable to the public. I hope that the Minister will put some of them into practice when considering national planning policy. First, we need a vigorous “brownfield first” policy. Brownfield sites that have had development on them before should be prioritised for the building of houses, rather than the green belt. That not only protects the countryside, but encourages the regeneration of our towns and makes best use of land

where the necessary infrastructure already exists. In Greater Manchester, there is at least 1,000 hectares of brownfield land spread over 400 sites that has not yet been fully developed for housing. That is more than enough to build at least 55,000 homes and it is probable that more land of that nature can be found.

We must also look for ways to optimise the density and quality of new housing developments, without eroding the green belt. After all, the green belt is an important barrier against urban sprawl. It encourages us to build upwards and not out. That allows people to live nearer their places of work and does not extend commutes, which in turn reduces the strain on local roads and transport infrastructure.

The Government recently conducted a consultation on the new approach to calculating local housing need, to which I submitted evidence. If the Government wish to proceed, I believe that the most significant policy change that should be implemented is for the new approach to calculating housing need to be considered at county level, rather than at metropolitan borough level. In the case of my local area, it would be considered by Greater Manchester rather than Stockport. It makes more sense to look at overall demand at a broader county level, rather than at borough level, especially in light of the devolution to city regions, combined authorities and metropolitan mayors, which look after other infrastructure and services.

Furthermore, members of the public do not necessarily observe and are perhaps even unaware of council boundaries as they go about their daily lives. They often live in one borough and work in another, and they may travel through several others to get from one to the other. The more artificial boundaries that form the basis of planning policy, the more divorced decision making is from reality. Critically, my proposal would allow flexibility to improve how local authorities work together to meet housing and other needs across their respective boundaries. Just because one borough has higher levels of employment or property values, it does not necessarily follow that it has more sites to build houses on.

In conclusion, the strength of local opinion is clear. The voices not only in my constituency but in neighbouring constituencies and from colleagues across the House are clear: the green belt should be safeguarded and previously developed urban land should be prioritised for housing instead. I recognise that the housing White Paper proposes to make it clear that green-belt boundaries should be subject to change only where the local authority can demonstrate that it has

“fully examined all other reasonable options”,

including the proper use of brownfield land. Indeed, any changes to green-belt designation should be made only as part of a wider local planning review process to ensure that there are opportunities for community consultation. Giving neighbourhood plans greater legal authority in planning law would be one means of achieving that. I commend the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) and hope that those on the Treasury Bench were in listening mode for his submission.

5.19 pm

**James Frith** (Bury North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), who is a Greater Manchester MP. I, too, will discuss the

Greater Manchester spatial framework, but I rise to appeal for balance in the pursuit of new housing and the need to protect our green-belt land. Local communities are not mean about the need for new homes in Bury. Grandparents want the best opportunity for their grandchildren to be able to own or afford housing. As has been said, this is about affordability and not just over-supply.

What we do not accept is the universal, one-size-fits-all approach taken by a Government issuing targets to regions without an appreciation of the place itself. Too often, planning lacks a democratic voice and feels too much like a developer's charter, and the Government have tipped the planning regulations against communities such as mine. I am proud to have stood at last year's election promising to help to rewrite the Greater Manchester spatial framework. I am clear that by working with our new Labour mayor and the leader of our Labour-led council, Bury now has a voice at the planning table, listening to the concerns of residents across Bury North.

Let me put a Bury case here. Of the some 2,000 people who responded to a survey in my constituency, 90% want local decisions, not Government diktat. New homes are needed, but they should be proportionate to a pre-determined agreement on green-belt land. Bury has the lowest proportion of brownfield sites, so targets handed down to us from London that take no account of the imbalance of green belt and brownfield land are wrong. They need to be adjusted. It cannot be that equal shares for housing targets are applied across a conurbation, when in some areas there is an abundance of brownfield sites, unlike in Bury.

The default to building homes must begin with brownfield sites, as was established under the last Labour Government. In the absence of such sites, we should continue with urban areas that are better supported with infrastructure and local services. Again, the concerns are that the 25-year spatial framework lays out the need for homes and housing, while there is no corresponding plan for the local public services. The Government target for homes has been issued at a time when Bury has lost £120 million from our ability to prepare public spaces, services, networks and local government budgets. Our schools are over roll and bursting at the seams. Our waiting lists are heavily populated, roads are brimming with traffic and potholes are minor sink holes, in some cases.

A Government that hands out plans for homes should first accept the need for local community voices to protect the green belt, where there is already considerable reach into that land, and then offer some sight of their plans to ensure that an appropriate level of infrastructure, public services and local government budgets can be associated with those plans. The Government's consultation on their new methodology for calculating housing need for localities is yet to be declared. We anticipate that it will be used to tweak yearly targets up, so we have no open door to local authorities questioning the housing targets based on the limitations of their area. To date, the Minister has ignored council requests and my requests, which I repeat here, to meet us to understand the Bury-specific issue on this point.

The Government targets ignore our needs. The original GMSF is to be rewritten, but it still sits within the framework guidance that the Conservative Government stipulate. The current set-up pits Tory Government numbers on housing with Labour leaders in Greater Manchester, working with local MPs such as me to

[James Frith]

protect green-belt land and minimise the impact of these housing targets on an ever-dwindling local government and public services budget.

Let me end by saying that for every resident in Bury who is unhappy that these numbers are far too high and who feels that green belt should be protected, there is a housing developer who is lobbying very hard, and quite possibly donating to the Conservative party, to argue that—[*Interruption.*] They don't like it up 'em. Those developers are arguing that the numbers are far too low to meet the Government's target. In Bury, we spoke with one voice and kept the walk-in centre open. Another promise I made at the election was to make the case to protect as much green-belt land as possible from development as a result of arbitrary targets imposed on Bury by this Government. Under their terms, 12,000 units are required in Bury by 2035, but approximately only 5,000 of them can be accommodated on brownfield.

In closing, I wish to propose some solutions. We should allow local authorities to enforce their own affordable housing policies; force developers to develop brownfield first; set dates by which sites need to have been completed; and allow councils to borrow more to mass build.

5.25 pm

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): The case for the green belt was put very powerfully by former poet laureate Sir Andrew Motion. He said:

“Since about 1940, the population of Los Angeles has grown at about the same rate as the population of London. Los Angeles is now so enormous that if you somehow managed to pick it up and plonk it down on England, it would extend from Brighton on the south coast to Cambridge in the north-east. That's what happens if you don't have a green belt.”

In a densely populated island, the green belt enriches our lives in many ways. It provides a precious opportunity to reconnect with the natural environment and spend time with friends and family outdoors. A substantial part of my constituency is in the green belt, and protecting it will always be one of my highest priorities. When media reports in advance of the Budget indicated, therefore, that the Government were considering dismantling green-belt rules, I argued strongly against this and raised it during Prime Minister's questions. Thankfully, my right hon. Friend's answer confirmed her support for green-belt protections, and no plans to rip them up appeared in the Budget after all.

We must build more homes in this country, but we do not have to sacrifice the green belt to do it. The Conservative council in Barnet, for example, is delivering more new homes than any other borough in London, and its main means of doing so is through regeneration of the borough's major estates. It is in the process of delivering 27,000 new homes under a 15-year plan adopted in 2012. In 2015-16, 1,460 new homes were built in Barnet—4.7% of the total for Greater London. Across its regeneration projects, the council is meeting the affordable homes target of 40%. I support this regeneration programme and other projects, such as the Victoria Quarter development in New Barnet, which is being taken forward by social landlord One Housing on a former industrial site.

Like my Conservative colleagues on Barnet Council, however, I am unhappy about plans brought forward by developers for high-density development squeezed into

low-rise suburban areas where it is completely inappropriate, so I have been part of a number of successful campaigns against the demolition of houses to make way for blocks of flats. I am opposing plans for tower blocks of luxury flats in North London business park, which were rejected unanimously by Barnet's planning committee, and I am fighting against proposals to build on the agricultural fields at Whalebones in High Barnet. I also oppose the planning application being considered this week for Barnet House in Whetstone. Barnet House hit the national news when the owners of the block proposed to use permitted development rights to convert it into hundreds of tiny flats. Described by some as dog kennel flats, some would have been only 16 square metres. Thankfully, the proposal was defeated, but I remain concerned about the scale of the plans that have replaced it.

I appeal to the Government to restrict or abolish the permitted development rights that allow the conversion of offices to residential use without a planning application. They deprive local residents of a say in whether such developments go ahead and mean that the people profiting from the development do not have to make any contribution to the services or infrastructure needed to support the new homes because no section 106 or other contribution can be obtained. This is a particular problem around the Station Road area in my constituency and was raised by residents when I was knocking on doors only a couple of weeks ago.

Another grave concern, I am afraid, is the Mayor of London's development plan. If this draft plan is approved, not only will it remove protection for gardens; it will actively encourage building over them, which would make it far harder to resist the kind of garden-grabbing development that Barnet Council was recently able to turn down for Crescent Road in New Barnet. The housing density matrix seems to have been completely removed from the London plan. If that goes ahead, there will be no limits on appropriate density in particular areas, which will place huge pressure on councils to approve denser and taller development. The targets for the building of family-sized affordable homes which were introduced by the last Mayor are also to go. The current Labour Mayor wants to prevent new developments within reach of public transport from including parking spaces, which would inevitably displace cars into surrounding streets, thus adding to the problems already faced by my constituents.

The draft London plan was described by a Conservative Member of the London Assembly, Andrew Boff, as a declaration of war on the suburbs. That is strong language, but there is no doubt that the Mayor's London plan is further evidence that Labour does not care about the suburbs and does not understand them—which is another good reason for Barnet to re-elect its Conservative council on 3 May.

5.30 pm

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): My party has long campaigned for 300,000 new homes to be built every year. There is a compelling social reason for that. Millions of people are now priced out of ever buying a home, and for the lucky few, the only opportunity comes with money from their parents or a direct subsidy from the state. Even then, eight out of 10 new homes are out of the financial reach of working people throughout the country.

The housing market is broken. It is a market built for the few and designed to exclude. The lack of housing is a crisis that is denying people—especially young people and the most vulnerable, in my constituency and across the country—a place to call their own. It should not be a luxury to own a home; nor should it be a luxury to have a secure tenancy. Building 300,000 additional homes every year would at least begin to reverse the decades-long failure to match demand with supply. The Government, however, have only one solution, which is to leave house building to the private sector. The interests of private house builders are simple: high profitability sustained over a long period. That means the slow release of property on to the market, land banking, and—as has already been discussed this afternoon—the building of five-bedroom homes rather than affordable housing.

There is an alternative to that business model. Local authorities and other public organisations must build homes on the basis of different priorities: not profit, but social need and public good. Last Christmas, one in every 111 children in the UK was either homeless or in temporary bed-and-breakfast or rented accommodation. The private sector benefits from that financially, but the private sector does not solve a single problem.

I have raised the subject of social housing, built by the public sector, many times in the House since my election last June, but the Government have not reciprocated. When I talk about the need for social housing, they respond time and again by talking about affordable housing, which is built by the private sector with some levels of public subsidy. According to research by Shelter, such housing is unaffordable for eight out of 10 working families. It gets worse. In my constituency, the local authority has just shown all developers how not to include affordable homes in their planning applications and has set an example of how to get around their own planning obligations to provide affordable housing.

The Government's Budget in November made some noises about empowering councils to build social housing. My party has long called for the housing revenue account borrowing cap to be lifted to allow councils to borrow in order to build social housing again, but my local authority, Bath and North East Somerset, transferred all its social housing stock more than 20 years ago—a move that the Government have encouraged many other authorities to adopt. There was nothing in the Budget for local authorities such as mine. Although the Budget announced the lifting of the cap, it will be lifted only in areas of high demand, and the process will not start for two years. A council's ability to borrow will be conditional on the whims of the Government, and on what they deem to be high demand. The Government say that they will allow councils to borrow to build, but councils such as mine that have given away their housing stock have little to borrow against, and they will have to continue to go cap in hand to the Government.

In conclusion, the private sector is not going to fix the housing crisis. The state can embark on a big social housing building programme, and I hope the Minister is listening. The worsening problem of homelessness, as well as individuals and families living in temporary accommodation, is not going to be solved by the private sector. The solutions are there for all to see, but the current position of the Government is blocking any progress. I call on the Minister to listen: the public sector must build again.

5.35 pm

**Neil O'Brien** (Harborough) (Con): We need to balance two things. On the one hand, we need to restore affordability and the dream of home ownership. In this country, house price inflation has been higher than that of any other OECD country over recent decades. Home ownership among young people is collapsing and the proportion of their income that private renters spend on rent is more than three times higher than it was in the 1960s and '70s, so increasing the supply of new housing is important.

On the other hand, we also want to preserve the important views and green spaces that we treasure. We want to get away from the broken model of speculative, fly-by-night development that we have in our country. In my constituency, people are furious when they spend two years working on a detailed neighbourhood plan only to see a developer swoop in at the last moment and build exactly where they did not want to see building. They are furious when developers, to get their road adopted, instead of spending any money, choose to rip out all the trees they planted when it was built. They are furious when developers tell them no new homes will be built next to the house they are buying, only to find that not only are new homes going to be built, but that the developer wants to drive massive trucks down their cul-de-sac to get there. We are trying to balance two different things, therefore.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) that increasing supply is not the only thing that matters, but it clearly does matter. France has roughly the same population and growth rate as us, but it builds twice as many homes as us and as a result house price inflation is half the rate it is here and half as many people have problematically high rents.

We need to increase housing supply, therefore, but we will never do so unless we address the reasons why people are concerned about development. The main three are as follows: first, we build in the wrong places; secondly, we build without having the economic and social infrastructure new homes need; and, thirdly, there is often no offsetting benefit for nearby residents. To solve these problems, we must not merely tweak the current system, but move to a different sort of planning system. We must get away from our passive, developer-led system and move towards a more active European system, in which the state plays a leading role in assembling land and deciding where new development happens. We must get away from sequential development—where we tack more and more development on to the end of every village, as in my constituency—and move towards an emphasis on new planned settlements where we can properly plan for new infrastructure.

That is the vision, but how do we get there? First, we need to capture more of the gains from planning gain. At present, we capture only about 25% of the massive uplift in land values that happen at the stroke of a planner's pen when planning permission is granted. If we had more of the gains of development capture, we could pay for better quality development, better landscaping in new development and more social infrastructure and benefits for the community.

I am therefore glad that the Government are looking closely at how we capture more of the gains of development for the community. We need to do that in the way we do it all over the world, and in roughly the same way as we

[Neil O'Brien]

did for the new towns. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) that there must be no question of expropriation or of not paying people the value of their land. However, I agree with the proposals of the excellent homelessness charity Shelter to reform the Land Compensation Act 1961 and compulsory purchase order law, to provide a reasonable price for the landowner and for the community.

I would like us to do what they do in most European countries and in places such as Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea, where the Government play the leading role in assembling land. Local and central Government buy land, give themselves planning permission, sell the land and use the profit to pay for quality development for community.

We must capture the gains of development for the community and then directly address the three causes why people oppose new development. We must get away from sequentialism and tacking things on. I notice that, in a number of cases, planning inspectors have struck down really good locally led proposals for new planned garden villages and garden towns, and we have to stop that. One village in my constituency was going to have a nice piece of separation land between it and the new houses, but in the name of sustainability, that has been turned round and we are now going to have new homes right next to existing residents. Nothing could do more to annoy local residents and increase opposition to development.

Secondly, we need more infrastructure. If we think about the great new planned places such as Milton Keynes, we realise that people do not have to live on main roads, because we can plan a sustainable new community and we can plan for the infrastructure that is needed. Thirdly, I would like to see more community benefit for people who live right by developments. As a localist, I do not believe that central Government should impose a particular number or proportion on the affordable housing that should be built in my constituency. That should be a matter of local discretion, and my local councillors and my local community would like to see less of the community benefit being spent on new social housing in the countryside and more being spent on benefits for existing residents, such as new doctors surgery places, new school places, new parking places and new roads, as well as more landscaping. Those are the things that people want to see.

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to do more to share best practice on how the new homes bonus money is spent, to ensure that residents are aware of that gain and that they can relate the gain to the cost of having a development on their doorstep?

**Neil O'Brien:** I strongly agree with that. Too often, the different systems—from section 106 to the new homes bonus—do not allow the people who are most negatively affected by a development to see the gains from that development.

We clearly need to reduce the demand for new housing as a speculative investment or an investment asset. Unless we do that as well as increasing supply, we will never solve the housing crisis. We need to increase the

supply of new homes, and the way to do that is not by pushing new housing down people's throats and imposing things on them but by having a system that looks at the reasons that people oppose new development and that addresses the underlying concerns. In that sense, I am pleased to agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs and also with my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles).

5.41 pm

**Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): It strikes me that now is the time to act. We have had enough speeches and articles, and enough wringing of hands. What are we going to do to build more houses for the people who need them? In this country there are currently about 128,000 children in homeless families living in temporary accommodation, 86 of whom live in a converted warehouse on an industrial estate in my constituency. There is no single solution to this long-term problem. There are many, but I would like to suggest just three to the Minister that I think are practical, easy and quick, because this has to happen quickly.

First, we need modular homes. Let us go back to the prefab. We have wonderful designs for modular homes in my constituency, including the Y:Cube set up by the YMCA, which provides units at a cost of about £56,000 a year. They have a 60-year life, and incredibly low gas and electricity bills because they are so well insulated. They can be put on small sites, and because of the way in which they can be plumbed in and connected up, it is always possible to get the land back at a later date. This can be done. The private and the charitable sectors are actively doing this now, and we can do it on small sites because the buildings are constructed in a factory rather than on site. One company that I met a few months ago, Ilke Homes, can provide three houses per day once the foundations are built. That is a solution that can be provided quickly.

Secondly, at the moment, public bodies such as local councils and health authorities have an incentive to sell their sites to the highest bidder. Many councils of all political persuasions hide behind the need to get best value. I suggest to the Minister that we need to change the planning framework to ensure that public bodies give first preference to residential development involving social and mixed developments.

Thirdly, we have been talking about the green belt, but, as we all know, the green belt is not always the green belt. The term does not necessarily apply to areas of outstanding natural beauty, parkland or "lungs" in cities. It can apply to the tatty bits of land that it is hard to believe are part of the green belt. I was amazed to discover that there are some 19,334 hectares of undeveloped green-belt land around train stations in London. If we were to develop only those sites, we could build 1 million new homes. Rather than sticking to one side of the argument or the other—building private housing or building public housing—we need a solution and we need it now. I offer just three, but there are many more and I could have a chat with the Minister over a cup of tea at any time.

5.45 pm

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): I first dipped my toe into this sort of water quite some time ago as a councillor in a small, unknown local authority in

south-west London. We swept in and made huge changes to the staff and the attitudes. In the planning department, for example, we introduced planners who thought laterally, took a positive attitude and worked with local developers and local people, bringing in imaginative programmes and buildings.

My constituency is on the edge of London. It remains a beautiful constituency: 90% of it is green belt, sites of special scientific interest, areas of outstanding natural beauty or similar. Most of the constituency falls within the Mole Valley District Council area, but the western wards form part of Guildford Borough Council's area. In developing its local plan, the district council is trying to meet its housing numbers with potentially spectacular developments adjacent to and around Leatherhead. To do so successfully, it will need to build imaginatively, higher and more densely. That is understood and expected by most people, including many Leatherhead residents. Of course, there is the usual small group, living in aspic, who want only low-rise housing and everything to be essentially the same. Whatever the eventual outcome, however, it is obvious to me that the local team, led by Councillor Simon Edge, is prepared to think outside the box, so I have real hopes.

I spent a period as a Minister in the then Department of the Environment and one of the things that I discovered was the variation in local authorities. Some are excellent, high quality and low cost and work with local residents, but some will not budge. When it came to planning, some local authorities—I will not name them—killed any hope of development and they are still there. Hopefully, Mole Valley council will not do that. Guildford Council, which has put its draft plan out for consultation, is a complete contrast. Some 57% of the housing that it intends to develop lies on current green-belt land and several thousand of the houses are in the Guildford wards of the Mole Valley constituency. The plan has been out for consultation in some form twice and the protests were gigantic.

Three of the plan's main sites lie adjacent to a section of the A3. Those who use the road will recognise the section from Guildford to Hook as one of the most consistently overloaded roads. The A3 crosses over the M25 at junction 10, which is the busiest, most accident-prone junction on the M25. Plans are in hand to improve the junction dramatically to meet current demands, but not the demand that will result from Guildford Council's plans. The council leaders should look to the surrounds of the town itself and use their imagination to build higher and denser quality housing.

I visited my old borough of Wandsworth to see how the council is handling the demand for homes. It has more homes under construction or in planning than the rest of inner London put together. That has been achieved through exciting, often iconic developments and a combination of compact development, quality development and height. In desperation, I sent the leader of Guildford Council a photograph of one of the more spectacular iconic towers. It is stunning. It is tall—it is far too tall for Guildford—but it is an example of how tall can be made to fit. However, my thoughts and those of many others have been rejected by the leadership.

The inquiry on the plan will be a battle to save the green belt. I hope that the Minister will look over the shoulder of the inspector at each of the local plan inquiries. It is an opportunity for that inspector—and

there are some very good inspectors—to assess the quality of the council as well as the quality of the local plan. If the local council is raiding the green belt as an easy option, rather than moving back in and around the towns, the plan should be heavily rejected and the council should be sent back to think again.

5.50 pm

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing this debate. The contributions have been excellent. I often meet constituents who bemoan the quality of our debates. I always tell them, "Don't bother watching on Wednesday lunch time. Switch on the BBC Parliament channel on a Thursday or Tuesday afternoon and you'll get an entirely different impression."

What has been interesting is how many of the issues that have been raised on both sides of the House have parallels. Listening to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) and the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), I was struck by how statist their solutions appear, which I strongly encourage. I remember two or three years ago when my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) first mooted the idea of seizing land off developers who are not getting on with building. It was seen as positively communist. It appears that, all the way from Doncaster to Grantham, the centre ground of politics really is shifting. I encourage much of that.

It is important to recognise that Governments can free space for the private sector to develop, but the rules of the game are the rules of the game at the moment. Given those rules, it is useless for us to come to this place and complain that developers do not build houses from which they cannot make a profit. We need to understand that. If we rely entirely on the private sector, we will get houses built and developed in areas where those houses will be profitable. London authorities will build houses at an amazing rate, but nothing like the same numbers will be built in towns in the north, where there has not been the same sort of investment in infrastructure and where a variety of other things have not been done. We will not see anything like the same numbers built and we will not get them built on brownfield sites.

In Chesterfield in 2005-06, a housing development was being built on the old Bryan Donkin site. The developer went bust about a third of the way through the development. That huge brownfield site remained unbuilt for the next seven or eight years. Therefore, there is no point our coming to this place to bemoan the fact that developers, which are companies that are ultimately there to make a profit, are not building on sites on which they will not make a profit.

What has been lacking from this debate is the sense that housing and planning are just one part of this whole thing. We need to talk about skills because, if there are not enough trained people in the construction industry to get more sites built, there will be an impact on the cost of labour, which will have an impact on the number of houses that are built.

Transport is incredibly important. The north has huge potential, but we need to improve the transport infrastructure. When 10 times more is spent on transport infrastructure in London than on transport infrastructure

[Toby Perkins]

in other parts of the country, it is unsurprising that everyone wants to move into London, where they can move about easily, and not into areas where they cannot move around so easily.

There has been a lot of talk about the green belt and that is sometimes misleading. Whenever I fly over Britain during the day while travelling overseas, I look down and see that Britain is a green and pleasant land—I fly over field after field before coming to a town or city. If we are to build these houses, the public sector needs to have a role because the public sector can build even in times when building is not profitable.

I would like to see the Government address the issue of right to buy. I am not against right to buy, but unless councils can borrow and know that they can build new houses without the prospect of having to sell them at a discount three years later, local authorities will not build those houses. Local authorities have a role to play in this and I would like the Government to recognise that.

I would like this debate to recognise the importance of transport and local infrastructure. We have heard about the objections in many areas to developments, but often when people are objecting they are concerned about the impact on schools, roads and local health services. Infrastructure needs to be a part of all this discussion, as do skills; we need a much wider debate.

In the final minute available, while touching on the planning issue, I also wish to discuss the issue of Traveller sites. In Chesterfield, we have a local plan, which is currently under consultation. The council has identified two sites for Travellers already in Chesterfield, but it has been told it needs to identify two more. There is a huge amount of public concern about that. Four sites in my constituency—in Grangewood, Newbold and Inkersall—have been consulted on and I know there are two such sites in the constituency of the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley). The pressure that is going on councils is unfair. There is also pressure on constituents, who are, for understandable reasons—I would be concerned for exactly the same reasons—very concerned about this. If we are going to see local authorities put in control of their areas, we do not need to see them forced to have such sites, as is currently happening in Chesterfield.

5.56 pm

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), who rightfully highlights the importance of skills and training for the next generation of people going into the building industry. On the 100th anniversary of universal suffrage, we also need to encourage more women to look at opportunities in the building trade.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing such an important debate on housing, planning and the green belt, about which every constituency across the land has many common concerns. If we get this right, we can create wonderful neighbourhoods and communities with the right level of green spaces, and the right sort of housing and infrastructure. If we get it wrong, however, as we too often do, we lose those valuable green spaces, because they are the places that developers choose first to build upon.

We are then left with the brownfield spaces that have been left behind, which are the blots on the landscape and the areas that people in local communities want to see developed first. One of the principal intentions in developing a green belt was not just protecting green spaces, but ensuring that inner-city brownfield sites were developed before those green spaces were taken up.

There is currently too much urban sprawl, which leads to all sorts of problems. It leads to the distinctive identities of communities, villages and towns merging into one, whereby they become an endless suburbia. It works against public transport, because where there is urban sprawl, it is difficult for buses to follow routes that will make enough money so that they can to keep running. It also means that people are a long distance from railway stations, meaning that they cannot get on a train, and if they are able to, they probably have to drive to the railway station, thus creating congestion and other traffic problems. Developers, councils and railway authorities also too often do not put in parking spaces at railway stations that will enable people to park up safely, which creates all sorts of problems for local residents because their streets are congested with all the cars.

We see across Greater Manchester that many of the new developments that are permitted, often by Labour councils, are not mixed housing that all people in the community can take advantage of. They are often executive estates, which are not there for the local community. That needs to change, and something that ought to drive that change is devolution to Greater Manchester. There is a huge and wonderful opportunity for Greater Manchester to have a vision about how it develops its planning and housing and, within the Greater Manchester spatial framework, ensures that housing, planning and protecting the green belt are all married up.

I would like the Minister to clarify something. I understand that the Greater Manchester spatial framework involves individual councils coming together to agree how many houses will be built. Wigan Council agreed its allocation of 16,500 houses, but then voluntarily chose to have an additional 3,000 houses on top of that. That goes against the wishes of local residents, who were already complaining about road congestion before Wigan Council sought to impose an additional 3,000 houses. That is the council's choice—it referred to its ambition to have those extra houses.

The Greater Manchester spatial framework will enable council leaders and mayors to work together to create a vision for development, but the first vision offered was an abysmal failure that was rightly torn up due to popular demand. The tearing up of that first framework has in turn delayed the Greater Manchester spatial framework mark 2, and that delay has enabled developers to target and cherry-pick greenfield spaces such as the Bowlands Hey and Leigh Hall developments in Westhoughton and the Hill Lane development in Blackrod, against local wishes.

The independent planning inspector has said that the failure to put the Greater Manchester spatial framework in place means that no meaningful weight can be given to planning objections. As a consequence, our green spaces are being taken up, congestion is increasing and communities are being damaged. Is it a coincidence that the Greater Manchester spatial framework mark 2 is to be published in June, following the local elections?

What is it that council leaders in Greater Manchester do not want us to know? Will voters have a chance to see the proposals before the May elections?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am going to increase the time limit back to eight minutes because a couple of speakers have withdrawn.

6.1 pm

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): I am grateful for that news, Mr Deputy Speaker, as it means that I can expound my argument a little more fully than I had thought. I congratulate my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), on securing the debate.

In the limited time I have—notwithstanding your generosity, Mr Deputy Speaker—I wish to cover three points. First, I do not think that we have a national housing crisis; we have a serious regional housing problem that is more severe in some parts of the country than others. Secondly, I shall say a little about housing finance, which my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury touched on. Thirdly, I shall say a word or two on an issue to which one or two Members alluded: the need to spread economic growth and development more evenly throughout the country. Doing so would help to deliver housing, including affordable housing, in many parts of the country.

Many Members have commented about the planning system, but I think that it is doing its job properly in many parts of the country by delivering housing in line with the projected population increase. Under the plans that local authorities are putting in place in my area of Gloucestershire, we are projected to build housing in line with the growth in population. There are a number of other regions throughout the country where that is true, but it is not true in London, where we are massively under-building housing compared with the growth in population, as several colleagues have mentioned. There is also significant pressure in the south-east and east. Those are the parts of the country where the projected growth in population is significantly outstripping the housing that is being built, so that is where the Government need to focus their efforts to bring the housing market under control.

My point about population growth is supported by figures on housing affordability, which give us a good idea about whether we are balancing the supply and demand of housing. Unaffordability is not significantly higher in most of the country now than it was before the financial crash, but that is not true in London. In London, the ratio of median house price to median gross residence-based earnings is nearly 13:1, whereas the average for the rest of the country is about 7:1, so London is skewing the national figure and giving a misleading impression.

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I talked about the houses that were being built in Wandsworth, but I should have mentioned that thousands of the homes are specifically for low rent or for purchase at low cost. In fact, the focus is on those people whom my right hon. Friend is so concerned about.

**Mr Harper:** That proposal sounds sensible. I am not familiar with the detail, but given what my hon. Friend sets out, it sounds like the local authority is focusing on demand. We will need significantly more of that if we are to meet demand in London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury put his finger on it when he spoke about housing demand. Clearly, compared with the situation when I was younger, we are much tougher with the loans that people can take out. When we look at what happened to the financial system after the banks made unwise lending decisions, such practice is probably very sensible, but it does make it more difficult for younger people to purchase houses. I welcome what the Government have done on the finance side of the argument, and two things are particularly welcome. The Help to Buy equity loan scheme is helping a significant number of young people who can afford a mortgage to be able to finance their deposit. It is not true to say, as some people do, that that only deals with the demand side of the equation, because it is of course only used for buying new houses. If we look at how house builders operate, we see that they build houses as they sell them. If we make it possible for a first-time buyer to purchase a home through the Help to Buy equity loan scheme, the house builder will then build more houses on that estate, as I have seen clearly in my constituency. Such practice helps on the demand side, which in turn generates housing supply.

I also welcome the introduction of the lifetime individual savings account, which enables younger people to save for a pension or a home, but I have one policy suggestion for the Minister. I am very supportive of our auto-enrolment policy to ensure that everybody saves for a pension, so will he consider whether we could apply auto-enrolment to lifetime ISAs? A young person going into the labour market would then find that their savings and their employer's contributions would go into a lifetime ISA—at least that would be an option—so that the money could be used to fund either a pension or a home. If someone is a homeowner when they retire, they will not need such a significant pension, because they will not be paying rent on the home that they own. I think that that sensible proposal might make younger people keener to save for a deposit, because they would find it more affordable, so I urge the Minister to consider the suggestion.

I am grateful that the Government have said so much recently about the northern powerhouse. Given the location of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury, I also welcome what the Secretary of State for Wales did with the Severn growth summit to encourage the development of what we might call a western powerhouse to create another centre of gravity for developing economic growth in Wales and the west country. It seems to me that one of the real problems is that we will not deal with the housing crisis simply by building more homes. London, for example, has high levels of immigration—23% of Londoners are non-UK born residents, and 156,000 migrants moved to London in 2016. Having listened to colleagues' concerns about excessive house building in London, I argue that we cannot build our way out of the problem. A longer-term solution is to generate progress in the northern powerhouse—in transport infrastructure and development in that part of the country—and then generate development in what I might call the western powerhouse in the west of the country and Wales. We could also look at things

[Mr Harper]

such as the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford growth corridor, so that we actually see economic development spread more equitably across the United Kingdom. That would mean that rather than feeling the pressure to move to London, or to get a job or create a new business there, young people in many parts of the country would feel able to stay in their home towns and cities, or indeed to move to Manchester and the great cities of the north. That will happen if we create a powerhouse that is globally competitive, as London is.

**Toby Perkins:** I am much happier with where the right hon. Gentleman is finishing his speech than I was with his position six or seven minutes ago. It seems that London has doubled in size during my lifetime, but the major cities of the north have hardly changed. If the message that the Government get today is that we need continually to expand the size of London, I agree entirely that we will not build our way out of this problem, as we will just continue to feed that demand. The solution has to be investment in infrastructure and skills all around the country, not just focused on London.

**Mr Harper:** I am glad that I have cheered up the hon. Gentleman as my remarks have developed, and I hope that I have had that effect on at least one or two other colleagues. He is right that that is the answer. There is a regional housing problem in the United Kingdom. House prices in London and its surrounding areas are massively out of kilter with the rest of the country, and we can deal with some of that by building houses. We do need to increase the density of house building in London, so I welcomed what the Government said yesterday about building upwards, and having slightly increased housing densities and slightly higher rise properties—not massive, but perhaps with more storeys than a traditional two-storey property—but we also need to spread economic growth across the country.

People with housing challenges who live in London should be as supportive of investment in the northern powerhouse and other parts of the country—and in creating a great, globally competitive city in the north—as people who live in the north. Such investment would result in us sharing economic growth more equitably across the country. That is how we deal with the housing challenges that we face more fairly and equitably, and it would also help the whole country's economic growth and make us more globally competitive.

6.11 pm

**Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) for calling this important debate. I am delighted to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper).

Does the Minister know how many affordable houses were built for Islanders two years ago? Thirty-five. Would the Minister hazard a guess at the number of affordable houses built for Islanders last year? Thirty-four. Just 79 affordable houses were built in two years for an Island with a population of 140,000. This is utterly unacceptable. It is proof of a system in need of reform and, judging by the many voices here, in need of much greater local flexibility and the support from the

Government that that would entail. I would like briefly to outline the problem and to suggest a few thoughts on the situation, locally and nationally.

Like many areas, the Isle of Wight needs sustainable, intelligent and sensitive regeneration to drive economic and social development. The current housing system does not serve the Island well. It is a system of developer-led housing, which generates only a small number of affordable houses. It fails to deliver the right type of housing. It is not sustainable. It encourages urban sprawl and all the transport problems identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) and others. It forces communities to accept unpopular local developments. And in a place like the Isle of Wight, which has a visitor economy and an important tourism industry, greenfield development actually damages our economy.

A better system would be one where there is a funding scheme to support housing associations and others to build—as a significant, if not near-100%, solution to our housing problems—genuinely affordable housing for local people in small-scale developments in existing communities. That would ensure that we were able to provide housing for our people and to protect our environment at the same time. The wrong type of housing actually damages our society, because what developers want is not what my constituents need. It is not designed for local people. And, frankly, even so-called affordable housing is not really affordable for many people who earn the Island's average wage.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** May I say how much I support the line that the hon. Gentleman is taking about the use of the word “affordable”? Does he agree that applying the word “affordable” to housing that is 80% market rent probably means that it is unaffordable for most?

**Mr Seely:** I thank the hon. Lady for her suggestion. I would say semi-affordable, rather than affordable—and, even then, people are reliant on the bank of mum and dad.

Housing associations tell me that what they need is one-bedroom or two-bedroom housing, but what is built, because we are part of a south-east market where people come to retire, is three-bedroom and four-bedroom housing, which is not what Islanders need. One of the most painful experiences of the last election was hearing the desperation of young people unable to find anywhere to live. I want a system that prioritises housing for Islanders at prices they can afford, and specifically for young Islanders. Indeed, research that I commissioned from the House of Commons Library a few months ago shows that an increase in our population on the Island has not led to an increase in prosperity—quite the opposite. Our gross value added per head has actually gone down slightly since 2000, while adult social care costs threaten to bankrupt us on a near-annual basis.

Throughout Britain, especially in island communities, in national parks, in areas of outstanding natural beauty, and perhaps even in the big cities nowadays, our country needs a system of building that is sensitive to the environment, caters for the resident population, and has much greater local flexibility. In considering these housing proposals, I am thinking not of the next five to 10 years—where to stick a housing estate now—but of what my Island is going to look like in 50 or

100 years' time. Its landscape has inspired people for generations, and, frankly, I do not want that disappearing just to fulfil Government targets.

Our housing policy should oppose, in principle, all greenfield development unless it has strategic advantage for Islanders. Our housing target is 640 houses a year. Few of those houses will be for people who currently live on the Island. For me, that is difficult to accept; in fact, I do not want to accept it. I have yet to meet a single person on the Island who supports it. It is much better for us to have a system that builds what we need. Working with Government and the Housing Inspectorate, we should aim to support the building of, say, between 200 and 400 properties a year, overwhelmingly funded by housing associations who will be given the support to do that. If that means social housing, council housing, or whatever we want to call it nowadays, then yes, that is what we need.

This housing should be built overwhelmingly for two groups of people: first, young people, for whom we need to build social housing, starter housing and shared-equity housing—we should also include key worker housing in this—and secondly, elderly people who are seeking supported and sheltered housing. We need to make sure that our elderly do not face a choice between an expensive nursing home, which very often the council ends up paying for, and staying in a bungalow or house that they cannot quite manage to run. By having that midway point, we can free up more housing as part of a more sustainable model of development. I hope to work on this with the Campaign to Protect Rural England, as well as other green or green-oriented groups, to develop a sustainable model that I can work on with the Minister and with the Government.

I envisage that some of this housing may be for, say, an old lady or an old gent who moves out of a bungalow that could then be purchased by a housing association who would have a planning assumption whereby they were allowed to repurpose the building, perhaps by adding a second storey or creating two properties on the site, so that we meet increased housing targets without eating into our precious landscape, and provide perhaps a home for old folks on the bottom and a younger couple on the top.

We need intelligent, sustainable and sensitive development. We do not have that at the moment; I do not feel that the current system provides it. I will do what I can in the coming months and years to work with the Minister, perhaps using the Island as a test case for a sustainable model of development that accepts some increase in population but also accepts that in unique environments we need to protect that landscape rather than just see green fields as further housing developments of the future. I look forward to working with the Minister on this.

6.18 pm

**Lee Rowley** (North East Derbyshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) on further enhancing his reputation as a doughty and energetic campaigner for his island. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing this debate.

I listened with interest to the exchange between my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and my near-neighbour, the hon. Member

for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), about where and how we should be building and the interaction with other things such as skills and the like. I do not think it is an either/or discussion, as we could do both. As the hon. Member for Chesterfield said, we have to build up the skills base and the infrastructure in the places that we have the privilege to represent. At the same time, I completely agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean that there are parts of this country where there is a clear imbalance in demand and supply, and we need to try to address that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury said, planning should be regional. We have clear evidence of problems with house building in certain parts of the country, primarily in London and the south-east. Given that a limited number of Members from London and the south-east are here at the moment, I guess I can get away with saying that, because they are not listening. There is a clear case for adopting the proposals and approaches that have been described. The suggestion from the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) with regard to building close to train stations is a very interesting one for areas where there is an acute supply difficulty.

However, in my constituency and those of many Members who have spoken today, we do not necessarily suffer from that acute supply difficulty. The Nationwide house price index suggests that in the past 10 years, the real-terms increase of house prices across the country has been in the order of 20%. In the constituency that I have the privilege to represent, we have had single-digit increases at best in some wards, and prices in some wards have reduced in real terms by up to 22%. If supply is a proxy for actual demand and for the issues we are talking about, there are examples in places such as North East Derbyshire where, because house prices are falling or staying static, there cannot be the demand issues that we are seeing elsewhere. That necessitates a different approach in places such as London and the south-east from places such as North East Derbyshire.

When we are talking about these issues, we also need to think about collaboration. When I go home every weekend, I get off the train at Chesterfield and drive past large swathes of brownfield land that could be redeveloped. In fairness, I know that the council is hoping to redevelop that land, but I understand the frustration of my constituents who drive past the same brownfield land and then are expected to accept increased building on greenfield or green-belt land in my constituency. As an addendum, my constituency has pledged to build a significant number of houses on brownfield land, so I am not trying to shift that to other parts of the country.

Along with collaboration and a regional approach, we have to accept that this requires local leadership. Localism requires local people to take control, and there is ample evidence that while the opportunity has been given by the Government since the Localism Act 2011, it has not been taken up in far too many places. My council in North East Derbyshire has not put in place a local plan since 2005. That plan is now 12 years old. North East Derbyshire is one of just 15 councils in the country that have been called out by the Government for failing to do that. The Labour leadership of the council still, six days after the Government's deadline, has made no public comment that I can find on the website about how it will solve that issue.

[Lee Rowley]

The council has spent 12 years going through the first three stages of an eight-stage process, which means that on current form, it will arrive at a local plan some time in the 2040s. That is probably not where we need to be as a forward-looking part of the world. We have to ensure that there is local leadership and local ownership, and where there is not, perhaps we need to look at how to replace people who refuse to take up the opportunities afforded to them.

In the time I have left, I want to focus on the second and third parts of the subject of the debate: planning and the green belt. I completely understand and accept the need to build more houses and that there should be a debate about that in places where we may have to build on green belt and greenfield land, but that should be locally led, locally understood and locally accepted.

Local residents find the apparent iniquities within the planning system incredibly frustrating. For example, people are unable to build a single farm building in certain parts of the country, and yet large-scale developments such as the ones talked about today are pushed through on account of local plans not being in place, so developers can swoop in and make applications in the way that has been described, as I see in parts of my constituency such as Wingerworth and Old Tupton. That is unacceptable because it undermines confidence in the planning system.

I would also say—I know I am going slightly off the point about housing—that such confidence is also undermined when we look at hydraulic fracturing. I spent most of yesterday in a planning committee meeting in Matlock for Derbyshire County Council to make a decision on fracking. When we have large-scale planning proposals such as that one, which will see the wholesale industrialisation of significant rural parts of our country, which local people are told that they should accept, despite not being able to have incremental increases in affordable housing in their local villages, they find that very difficult to accept.

I welcome the Localism Act, even though it brings challenges. We have to look at ways in which we can rebalance our approach in such matters from a regional perspective. However, we must also make sure that there is confidence in such planning approaches and in the planning system by ensuring that such large-scale and often unwanted developments are contextualised in a system in which people are heard.

6.26 pm

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): It is a great pleasure to contribute to this very important debate. It is also a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), who, if I may say so, spoke with clarity and force this afternoon. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing the debate.

We have a challenge in this country: in one word, affordability. I see that quite clearly in my constituency of Witney and west Oxfordshire. We are very lucky that, statistically, we have almost full employment. It is a very pleasant part of the country in which to live—it is very green, with beautiful buildings, lots of jobs and Oxford nearby—and it has relatively good transport links, although more of that, perhaps, in a moment. However, that means there is a real challenge, because for very many

people, the cost of housing has simply outstripped the ability to pay. This has an impact on all sorts of services that my constituents need. To give just one example, it affects the recruitment of GPs and teachers. This is a very real challenge. For swathes of young people—when I say that, I mean people under 40—owning a home, a dream almost universally shared, has become out of reach, and we absolutely must tackle this challenge.

There is certainly an issue with supply. I am well aware, as all hon. Members will be, of the statistic showing that, for many years under Governments of all colours, insufficient houses have been built. We have been building approximately a half of what we need. However, it is very important that we do not become fixated and obsessed simply with numbers. This is not all about supply or simply numbers, not least—I am very glad that the Government are reassessing the NPPF—because there is a question mark over how the supply figure reached through the strategic housing market assessment is calculated. There is a suspicion that it is too reliant on developers, who in due course drive the figure higher than it actually is.

We sometimes get the terminology wrong in this House. We tend to talk about developments when we should really be talking about communities, and we tend to talk about houses when we should really be talking about homes, because they are precisely what we are building in this country. We need to remember that we are building communities, and these will be the communities of the future. It is in 20 or 30 years' time, when the builders have long since moved out and other MPs are representing the area, that the success of the rules we are putting in place now will be judged.

In my constituency, I am very keen that we do not just look at the green belt, important though it is to protect it. A relatively small amount of my constituency is green-belt land, but I have some of the most beautiful countryside in the country. Communities simply will not accept a cavalier approach to house building in such areas, and we need to guard against such an approach.

I am glad that the White Paper has been published and has addressed a great many of these issues and that the NPPF is being looked at. I have spoken about how the need figures are calculated and I am glad, too, that the issue of building on brownfield lands first is being looked at as a priority by the Government.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), who is not in his place, who really hit the nail on the head in talking about the build-out rate. It is crucial that when planning permissions have been granted the developers build them out, that there is not a practice of land banking and that they do not, for reasons of profit or any other reason, fail to build those out. This simply must happen. It must be built into the planning system. There might be things that the Government can do to help or that local government can do to help, such as bringing in small builders or local builders to ensure that those areas can be built out as and when local communities need them.

We need robust local plans throughout the country, and I would also like neighbourhood plans to have teeth. One of my hon. Friends referred to the fact that if local communities are asked where they think the housing ought to go to serve their needs, more housing might be built, but what is crucial is that local communities are

consulted and listened to about those homes. They know which areas are likely to be flooded and which areas are unlikely to be able to take any traffic growth. They are therefore able to advise district councils—and, in due course, the Government as well—on where housing should go.

I would like those neighbourhood plans to have more teeth because nothing is more infuriating for a community than to spend months and thousands of pounds developing a neighbourhood plan—they are not cheap—only to find that it is given next to no weight in the local plan process. Those plans simply must be given weight. I suggest that the results would be good for everyone as we look at tackling this affordability challenge.

In the short time remaining, I want to look a little more at infrastructure. Communities, quite reasonably, oppose housing developments nearby when people worry about how they are going to get to work, where their children are going to go to school and which GP surgery they will go to if they are ill. The garden village scheme in many ways has a lot to commend it, because for many years we have seen penny packeting, where housing is put on the edge of a village but nothing else is added, so there is no increase in road provision, no increase in the number of GP surgeries and so forth. However, it is crucial that the schemes are well planned and the garden villages indeed have GP surgeries and shops and that the infrastructure, particularly around roads, is introduced at the same time.

There is such an example in my constituency, just to the north of Eynsham. Hon. Members who have heard me speak on just about any subject in the House will know that I will almost certainly mention the A40 at some point, and I do so again now. I am well aware that there is a lot of concern about the development in Eynsham, because anybody leaving Witney or any of the towns and villages in that area—I do not live far away myself, so I am well aware of the problem—or anybody leaving Eynsham spends hours in traffic as things are now. If thousands of houses are built in Witney and thousands are built to the north of Eynsham, people understandably fear that the infrastructure simply will not cope—and it really will not when we are talking about the A40, which is a single-track road heading into Oxford.

It is crucial that, across the whole of planning, that infrastructure is built in first, so that we have the schools and GP surgeries that we are going to need and that we do not have thousands more people trying to pile into the same local Co-op. Crucially in my case, the A40 must be addressed.

I am grateful to the relevant Department, which is well aware of my submissions on this subject. I am grateful, too, that my local county council has put in a strong housing infrastructure fund bid and that the major road network consultation is taking place at the moment.

I want to talk about innovation. In this country, we have not made anything like enough use of what are called prefabs or timber-frames, and we must do much more. There is a real challenge of affordability here that can be addressed through using technology and innovation. In my constituency, I have examples of companies that build just such structures.

On architecture, people expect that if housing is being built it will reflect the nature of the area in which

it is being built. Having that would mean that we also had the consent for the housing that we need. That must never be forgotten.

I end by noting that we are building communities—places—and it is the people who live in them who really matter.

6.34 pm

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I start by thanking right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed today, not least the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), who secured this important debate. It is good to see the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), a former Planning Minister, back in his place.

I am acutely aware that the subject of this debate is often contentious and that discussion of the green belt can be fraught with difficulty. It is very good that this afternoon there has pretty much been consensus across the House. I understand that Members may be concerned that the need to build more homes will lead to increased pressure to build on green-belt land, but we must recognise that that pressure would be ameliorated to an extent if so much of our development land was not subject to land banking. I know from experience that that is a growing problem that is hampering the ability of local authorities to deliver the homes we need.

Some of the figures are startling. Last year, Shelter estimated that more than 320,000 homes that have been given planning permission in the past five years have not been built. That alone represents much more than a year's worth of the supply of new homes that we need. Numerous organisations have expressed concern about this issue, including Shelter and the National Trust, and *The Guardian* and other publications have investigated its extent. The results are alarming. *The Guardian* has suggested that the nine biggest house builders are sitting on 600,000 undeveloped plots of land.

That is why Labour has, for several years, called for “use it or lose it” powers to ensure that planning permissions are used and that sites are built out. There must be both incentives for developers to build sites out at a faster rate and greater enforcement on those that do not.

I am glad that the Government have finally announced a review of build-out rates, but I fear that it is sadly too late. In the meantime, thousands of families have missed out on the opportunity of getting a new home. I would be very grateful if the Minister told us whether the Letwin interim review of build out is likely to report in the spring and how soon he expects proposals to come to the House to tackle land banking. I would also like to know whether the review addresses the reason for stalling on a number of sites and the need for remediation funding, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg).

Let me be clear about Labour's green-belt policy. As was stated in our manifesto last year:

“We will prioritise brownfield sites and protect the green belt. We will start work on a new generation of New Towns to build the homes we need and avoid urban sprawl.”

That has been a consistent Labour policy. It was reiterated in the Lyons review in 2014, which stated that

“the policy of containing urban areas in England has been highly effective in its objective of preventing urban sprawl and stopping adjacent cities from merging together. There is clearly value in the preservation of areas of amenity land close to our urban areas for people to enjoy.”

[*Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods*]

It continued:

“Planning authorities seeking to meet local housing need should be reminded that current policy provides for both review of and change to green belt boundaries, including swaps of land, as long as that is in the context local plan preparation or review and is the subject of detailed local consultation.”

We want to protect the green belt, but to continue to give local authorities the flexibility they need to change it in line with local expectations and local plans.

The Government are letting communities down over the protection of green-belt land and are not giving local authorities the tools they need to protect high-quality green spaces around urban areas. Organisations such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England have expressed concern that the changes being made following last year’s housing White Paper to define the exceptional circumstances in which green belt development is acceptable are “insufficiently robust”.

**Dr Drew:** Does my hon. Friend understand the frustration in places like Stroud when the number of affordable housing units needed is ratcheted up, but we are completely unable to prevent the developers from building executive houses? Does she agree that that dilemma just makes us look hopeless in terms of general residents’ interests?

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point, which has been much made this afternoon. The change signalled by the Government is what I think led my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) to label the policy “green belt first”. My hon. Friends the Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and for Bury North (James Frith) also clearly highlighted the difficulties of that approach.

Last year, the Government proposed a new method for calculating the housing need for local authority areas, but unfortunately the new formula does not take into account the amount of land that is protected in a given area. For example, in County Durham, 43% of the area is green belt, an area of outstanding natural beauty or under conservation area protection. Again, that causes problems for the local authority, and the Government need to address the issue urgently.

The National Housing Federation said that the Government’s target of 300,000 new homes a year will not be met unless we make better use of land. So far, as the Minister will know, we have not come close to reaching that target, with only—this was a huge improvement on previous years—183,000 homes built last year. The Government need to reach the target, and that point was made very effectively by my hon. Friends the Members for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins).

The National Housing Federation has called for the Government to

“think innovatively about how best to use public, brownfield and greenbelt land to build the homes and communities”—communities is a very important point—that “we need”.

I agree that there must be more creative and collaborative solutions to the housing crisis. We need to see much more of local authorities working together, with much greater support from the Government, to set up new towns and garden cities.

The Government must do more to ensure that local residents and businesses feel in control of development in their areas. Too often, people are left feeling that planning is done to them, rather than it being a process in which they can participate. We know that the Department will prepare a new draft of the national planning policy framework for consultation soon, and the Government must take the opportunity to address some of these issues. That point was made excellently by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North. The local plan process must be strengthened and proper consultation must be guaranteed. There must also be greater investment in planning departments, which have been starved of resources. They need additional resources to ensure that developments are correctly assessed and that local policies are properly implemented.

A survey of local councillors that was carried out last year by the Local Government Information Unit and the National Trust found that 50% of local councillors saw sites being approved for development that were not in line with local plans. However, it should be through the local and neighbourhood planning process that appropriate sites are allocated for development and that any changes to protected designations such as green belt are undertaken. In that way, communities can best plan for sustainable development and control future development in their area.

6.43 pm

**The Minister for Housing (Dominic Raab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing the debate. He made some powerful points about the supply of new homes, the type of stock and the wider issues about affordability. They were tenaciously made and duly noted by the Government. I also pay tribute to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), for the sterling job that he did. I know that he will take that energy and focus into the Department for Work and Pensions.

Today, we have had a thoughtful and very well-informed debate, with valuable insights from hon. Members across the House representing a range of communities, whether those are urban, rural or suburban communities like my own. Building the homes that Britain needs is one of the great social challenges of our generation—a national mission—but we must carry local communities with us. We have heard a lot about that today. From my point of view, I see that dual mission not as a zero-sum game, but as two sides of the same coin. We must get an effective set of outcomes that work not only for the country, but for communities.

The most recent data from the English housing survey shows that the proportion of households owning their own home has steadily declined since 2003 to its current level. It stabilised around 2013 and has remained broadly stable since. We are therefore at a crossroads. It is time to turn this challenge into an opportunity and grasp it with both hands.

There are some positive signs. Last year, we saw 217,000 homes delivered, the highest number in all but one of the last 30 years. Just last week, the Halifax survey showed that the number of first-time buyers in 2017 was the highest in 10 years—since the financial crash—while the National House Building Council survey showed the highest number of new homes registered to be built since the financial crash. That, though, must be

the point of departure, not the point of arrival. We need to deliver in the region of 300,000 homes each year, if we are to provide the homes Britain needs and make them more affordable—for the nurse, for the teacher, for those young families on low and middling incomes trying to get on to the housing ladder.

This is not just about those who are buying, of course: increasing the supply of new homes is vital for bringing down the cost of renting, too. The Government have an ambitious plan and we are restless to get more homes built. There is no silver bullet, as hon. Members pointed out. There are just various pieces of the jigsaw puzzle and we must be assiduous in putting them all together. The first policy lever is the national planning policy framework. I am pleased to say that we will be consulting on changes to the NPPF to reduce obstacles to home building. In that context, I listened carefully to the range of concerns raised by hon. Members across the House.

I will not pre-empt publication, but as the House will know from the Secretary of State's statement, we intend to consult on changes, for example, to density to free up local authorities to build perhaps one or two storeys higher—whether apartments, terraced homes or other designs—if that is in keeping with their local area and in accordance with what local constituents and communities want. That will provide greater flexibility in towns and urban areas, where demand is particularly high. The points about regional variations in demand and affordability were well made by hon. Members across the House. We want to encourage homes to be built—we want to clear away those obstacles—and to promote local design, buy-in and support for this national mission. We will therefore publish a revised draft of the NPPF and launch our consultation by Easter.

I want to be clear on one issue on which feelings always run high—I know from my own local experience how important it is: the green belt, which is cherished by hon. Members and their constituents and communities. Our NPPF makes it clear that most new building on green-belt land is inappropriate and should be refused planning permission, except in very specific circumstances, and only in exceptional circumstances may a local authority alter the green-belt boundary, after consulting local people and submitting a revised local plan for formal examination. Broadly, since 1997, the proportion of green-belt land has stayed relatively steady at 13%.

There is a broader point here about home building and the overriding need to carry local communities with us, whether rural, suburban or urban communities. That is why last week the Government announced the first wave of money being allocated from the homes infrastructure fund. Last week alone, we targeted £866 million of investment, or 133 local housing projects, from London to Manchester, Cornwall to County Durham, to unlock building capacity for up to 200,000 new homes. We recognise we need more homes, but we also know that communities worry about new developments—my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) made this point very well—and ask some reasonable questions: what will it mean for congestion on the roads, and what will it mean for pressures on schools and local NHS services? There is certainly a link with pressures from immigration. Once we have left the EU, we will have greater scope and control over that to get the balance right.

The Government hear those concerns loud and clear. That is what the homes infrastructure fund helps to address. We will be having a further round of funding in about a month's time to deal with bigger infrastructure projects. The key is that, by investing in local authority-led projects in areas where demand is greatest, we can build not just more homes but stronger communities at the same time, which is crucial to the strategy the Government have presented.

I come now to the next public policy lever that we must yank even harder to speed up the rate of building—the shadow Minister and Members on the Conservative Benches made this point. There is, I think, a cross-party consensus on the objective, although whether there is such a consensus on the means is another question. The point was made very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) and also by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods).

Let me put this in context. In the year ending March 2017, 304,000 planning permissions for new homes were granted, an increase of 15% on the previous year and of 70% on five years ago. The latest figures—which, admittedly, date from 2016—show that detailed planning permission was granted to 684,000 homes that had not been completed.

The Government's position is clear: new homes should be built as soon as possible once planning permission has been granted. Our housing White Paper contains a range of proposals to tackle issues that delay or prevent the building out of developments. They include proposals to give local authorities stronger tools with which to ensure that sites with planning permission are built out, to provide more transparent data on housing delivery and to tackle delays associated with, in particular, pre-commencement conditions.

My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) is leading a review of the gap between the number of planning permissions being granted and the new homes actually delivered, with a view to reducing it. The review panel will make its recommendations for closing the gap and will report on its findings later this year. We want to establish what more can be done to ensure that developers cannot wriggle out of commitments to build more affordable homes in the right places, after planning permission has been granted. That is another important piece of the jigsaw: another important element of the strategy that we are presenting today.

Members across the House made the point that Governments must lead by example. This is not really about a private sector monopoly; the state has a role to play. That argument was made especially clearly and saliently by the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins). Releasing more surplus public sector land to boost the supply of new homes is obviously a powerful way of achieving our goal. We will be pressing Whitehall Departments to release more of that surplus public sector land, with a view to generating a further 160,000 new homes. Homes England can help them by providing expertise and targeted investment.

Let me return to the objectives to which I referred at the beginning of my speech. The release of public sector land offers opportunities to provide less expensive homes for essential public sector workers such as nurses, teachers and police officers.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** May I suggest that that will happen only if the Government force—or encourage—public sector bodies to do it? Extorting their good will will not work.

**Dominic Raab:** I know that the hon. Lady has a great deal of experience in this regard and she is right. I suspect that what is needed is a mixture of coaxing and cajoling, carrot and stick. We must try to ensure that there is a win-win. However, it seems to the Government, and certainly to me, that there is a huge opportunity not just to build more affordable homes, but to control the process to ensure that those homes are for key workers on low and middle incomes.

We have heard a range of excellent speeches. I shall try to do justice to as many as possible in the time available. The hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) raised the issue of funding and, in particular, the issue of the homes infrastructure fund. As I have said, we want to encourage the building of more homes, but we know how important it is to provide the infrastructure that will enable us to carry communities with us.

**Derek Twigg:** May I press the Minister on that, if he does not mind? Halton Borough Council is saying that, because the brownfield land is either contaminated or has already been allocated and used, there are exceptional circumstances to build on the green belt. My constituents do not agree and nor do I. Can the Minister tell me whether that is correct? May I also ask whether he is going to do anything about developers who build on green belt before all the brownfield land has been used?

**Dominic Raab:** The national planning policy framework makes it very clear that building on the green belt must be the last resort. Well disposed as I am towards the hon. Gentleman, he will not tempt me to start commenting on individual plans or planning applications, but I can tell him, in relation to his own local authority, that we did not have a bid for the homes infrastructure fund and we want the bids to be locally driven. Then we will look on them as sympathetically as possible—in accordance, obviously, with a set of criteria—to maximise the output.

**Mr Seely:** Does my hon. Friend understand that, for smaller authorities such as Isle of Wight Council, which is just about the smallest county council in Britain, it is difficult because we do not have the capacity always to know how the central Government system works? Therefore, we lose out when it comes to applying for some of these funds.

**Dominic Raab:** I listened to my hon. Friend's passionate, tenacious and articulate speech on behalf of the Isle of Wight. I am happy to look again at whether we can provide any support in relation to the bidding process, but we are in a Catch-22 because we will be criticised for imposing ideas on local communities—particularly the smaller ones—if we do not allow bids to be community-driven and led. However, let us take that forward and see whether we can work together.

I cannot tell my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) how fantastic it was to see him in the Chamber, back in fine fettle, setting the housing market in context. As usual, he is a one man walking ideas factory, offering ideas that I am already

in part looking at trying to take forward. He made a powerful case for the national mission to build more homes and for trying, as we—I emphasise this—carry communities with us, to think in radical terms to get this job done.

The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) made some important points about the green belt. My right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) brought his experience directly from a local public inquiry to inform the debate at the national level. He also raised the issue of equality of arms between developers and local communities, an important point well made.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** *rose*—

**Dominic Raab:** I am going to make some progress as I need to allow two minutes for the wind-up, otherwise it would be frowned upon by Madam Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) and for Bolton West (Chris Green) talked about the need to prioritise brownfield over green spaces. That is already in the NPPF of course. We will look at whether we need to reinforce that message. My right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) made important points about finance, but also about the geographical differences in the housing challenge we face. He made those points well. My hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) also talked about having a tailored approach to different regions and communities. That point was well made.

The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) spoke about the reality that a lot of affordable housing is not that affordable and is still costly. We clearly need to look at that both in this context and in the social housing Green Paper. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) spoke with passion and conviction. She is right that we need to address this at many levels. I like the sound of some of her ideas and look forward to having that cup of tea with her and seeing how we can take them forward.

This Government's mission is to reverse the decline in home ownership and revive the dream of Britain as a property-owning democracy. We must revive that dream for the key workers and for those on low and middle incomes striving to get on to the first rung of the housing ladder. Above all, we must deliver the homes we need for the next generation. We must build the homes Britain needs in the right way and in the right places. That is a great challenge, but an even greater opportunity, and one we must seize with both hands.

6.57 pm

**Mr Robertson:** I thank the Minister and all the Members who have contributed to this debate; as I anticipated, it was heavily subscribed. Members raised points from their own constituencies, which was perfectly correct. That gave a good flavour to the debate, which has given the Minister a lot of good ideas—and maybe a few headaches as well.

In winding up, I want to pick up where the Minister finished. I entirely agree with him: one of my favourite Margaret Thatcher policies was that on home ownership. She extended home ownership to so many people who previously would not have had the chance to own their

own home. I am absolutely with the Minister and the Government in their desire to increase the number and percentage of people who own their own home.

I am pleased that the Minister recognised that housing supply is not the one silver bullet. Indeed there is no silver bullet. I stress that the building of more and more and more houses will not necessarily lead to greater affordability. There is not an easy answer, but we must work even harder to make sure that we achieve what I think all Members want.

I certainly will contribute to the discussions on the planning guidance. I ask for further clarification, however, on the green belt and unmet housing need. As I said earlier, the Government have stated in planning guidance in the past that unmet housing need is unlikely to outweigh harm to the green belt in importance. The Government must be a little clearer on that as we move forward.

**Dominic Raab** *indicated assent.*

**Mr Robertson:** I am pleased to see the Minister nodding to my request on that point.

Again, I thank all Members for contributing to this interesting and important debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered housing, planning and the green belt.

## PETITIONS

### NatWest bank closures

7 pm

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on the closure by the Royal Bank of Scotland of two of its NatWest branches in my constituency. I present it on behalf of the residents of the towns of Penistone and Stocksbridge, and it has been signed by 1,400 citizens.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Penistone and Stocksbridge,

Declares that the proposed closure by the NatWest Bank of its local branches in the towns of Penistone and Stocksbridge should be reconsidered by the bank; further that the closure of these branches will leave both towns without bank services; further that the bank claims electronic banking will still allow customers to access services; further that the petitioners believe for many customers that this will not be possible and further that petitioners maintain that the closure of these branches could have a detrimental effect on many small business in the area.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to recommend that the NatWest bank reconsiders the closure of these two branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002105]

### Mount Oswald Estate

7.2 pm

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I hope you will bear with me, Madam Deputy Speaker, while I present these two petitions. The first is from the residents of the Mount Oswald estate in Durham.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Mount Oswald Estate in Durham,

Declares that the new development, built by David Wilson Homes, where there are residents who lack any form of acceptable

broadband service; further that the estate's phone lines are currently connected to a cabinet over 2 km away, resulting in a typical broadband speed of 0.3 megabits per second, well below the standard broadband speed of 17 megabits per second; further that this is well below the broadband service that should be expected in a new-build development with a city-centre postcode; further that with the development of several hundred new homes immediately adjacent to the Mount Oswald Estate the broadband speeds are likely to deteriorate further without any action.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make provision for the installation of a new fibre-enabled cabinet in the immediate vicinity of the Mount Oswald Estate to ensure a future-proof service for all current and future residents of the estate.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002109]

### Sherburn Hill School, County Durham

7.3 pm

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** The second petition is from the residents of Sherburn Hill on the closure of Sherburn Hill School. They believe that Durham County Council has not guaranteed that all its pupils will be eligible for transport-to-school funds.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Sherburn Hill,

Declares that the proposed closure of Sherburn Hill school in County Durham is contrary to the wishes of the local residents and that children will have to attend other schools in other villages; further that the community at Sherburn Hill have already lost all other existing community facilities, including a Sure Start centre and a community centre, and that the closure of this school will represent the closure of the last communal indoor space in the village; further that Durham County Council have not fully investigated other options for keeping the school open.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to call on Durham County Council to reconsider the decision to close Sherburn Hill school.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002108]

### Closure of Lloyds bank branch in Woolston

7.4 pm

**Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): I did not think that I would be the first to present a petition about a bank closure, but I have no doubt that I will not be the last. Before I get to the text of the petition, I want to say that I am disappointed with the chief operating officer of Lloyds Bank Group, Juan Colombás. I wrote to him twice on my constituents' behalf, but I did not even receive the courtesy of a reply. The petition is about the closure of the last bank branch in a district of my constituency.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Southampton Itchen,

Declares that the residents of Woolston object to the closure of Lloyds Bank which will result in there being no banks left in Woolston.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage Lloyds Bank, a bank that was bailed out by the taxpayer during the financial crisis, to reconsider the decision and keep the Woolston branch open.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002110]

## Autism: Educational Outcomes

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Kelly Tollhurst.)*

7.5 pm

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): As a female MP, I am honoured to have secured this Adjournment debate on the 100th anniversary of women gaining the vote.

Last week saw the launch in Parliament of the “Autism and education in England 2017” report of an inquiry, which was co-chaired by myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), that formed part of the work of the all-party parliamentary group on autism. The report came about due to our first-hand experience as new MPs of listening to many parents who visited our surgeries to tell us their stories of the difficulty of getting support for a child with autism.

The often invisible nature of autism means that it can be difficult for a child to get a diagnosis. The process can be long and difficult for parents, often taking years rather than months. Parents feel that the extreme pushing that they have to undertake to get a diagnosis for their child often means that they are labelled as bad or difficult parents who just cannot cope with a naughty child. As a result, a diagnosis can be missed or delayed by many years. Many parents tell me—I know that colleagues have had the same experience—that they often have to resort to paying for a private assessment so that their child can get a diagnosis and start receiving the support that they need.

The problems for parents and autistic children do not end even once a diagnosis has been made. The lack of support that they receive in our schools and education system is shocking, and teachers, who desperately want to help these children, can feel inadequate and unable to offer support because they have had little or no training. I am pleased to say that that will change this year, because initial teacher training will include dealing with children on the autistic spectrum. However, that will not tackle the lack of training for existing teachers and headteachers.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. We are all in the Chamber for the same reason: we know constituents who have faced such problems. A Northern Ireland Department of Health report confirmed that there has been a 67% increase in the number of school-age children across all trust areas in Northern Ireland who are diagnosed with autism. I am sure that the figure for the hon. Lady’s area is similar, so does she agree that that massive increase must lead to an increase in the support for such children in schools? If each class has a classroom assistant, it is a vital step towards improving educational outcomes for children with autism.

**Maria Caulfield:** I agree. Our report found that as many as one in 100 children attending our schools is on the autistic spectrum, which means that a significant number of children need our support.

Our inquiry heard from teachers who told us not only how they struggle to support students in mainstream schools because of a lack of special educational needs provision, but about the difficulties they experience because they have not received training. That comes on

top of a lack of specialist provision for children for whom mainstream education is not sufficient. However, such children are often placed in mainstream education, which just cannot cope with their needs.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on their first-class report, which will make a big contribution in this area and a big difference to people’s lives.

Does my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) agree it is not just initial teacher training—autism awareness training is being included in that training for the first time this year—but the training of teachers who are already in place, such as by the Autism Education Trust, that is making a difference? In the light of her study, would she go further and say that school leaders, school governors and other people involved in educational institutions should also be trained in autism awareness?

**Maria Caulfield:** My right hon. Friend is correct, and one of our report’s findings is that the training needs to go wider than just teachers. I will touch on that when I come to our recommendations.

Given the lack of support, children on the autism spectrum often end up in crisis. If they had received the support they needed in the first place, and if they had received a quicker diagnosis, such children would often thrive in school.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I commend the hon. Lady on the report of her inquiry, which she co-chaired with the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman).

Cora Leeson, who is a passionate campaigner and advocate for children with autism in my constituency, contacted me after the launch of the report to highlight her concern about the number of fixed-term exclusions from school of children with unidentified SEN, including those with autism. Does the hon. Lady share my concern about the educational attainment of children who are being excluded because they have not received a diagnosis or because, if they do have a diagnosis, they are not receiving appropriate support within mainstream schooling?

**Maria Caulfield:** The hon. Lady is right. Some 17% of children with autism have been suspended from school at some point. Of that number, 48% have been suspended three or more times, and 4% have been permanently excluded, so the current school system is not working for a significant number of children. That has consequences in later life because, as experts told our hearings, if these children have the right support, they should be doing well in school. Because of their educational outcomes, only 16% of autistic adults currently end up in full-time work, and only 32% end up in any type of work at all. That tells us that their experience in the early years of being excluded or suspended from school has an impact on their educational attainment, which has a long-term impact on the rest of their lives.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): I declare my interest at the outset. My wife is a music therapist and much of her work is with children who have autism, which gives me an insight into many of the challenges that families face.

I am listening to my hon. Friend with great interest. Does she agree that children with special educational needs have just as much right to be educated as every other child and that that education can make a real difference to their ongoing lives? We must not forget them, but we must also not forget their parents, who can often feel very isolated. SEN provision in schools can make a real difference for parents, too.

**Maria Caulfield:** My hon. Friend is right. These children have not just a right, but a legal right. As the inquiry heard, the most frustrating thing is that existing legislation should be providing for such care in the education system. We have not only the Children and Families Act 2014, but the Autism Act 2009, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) introduced. The 2009 Act, which is the only disability-specific piece of legislation that we have in England, sets out how autistic adults should be supported.

The problem is therefore not that the legislation is not in place, but that it is not being upheld. As the 10-year anniversary of the Autism Act approaches, we need a national autism strategy to help children and young people, to ensure that the current laws are upheld and to make sure that all autistic children receive the help to which they are legally entitled. Without that, we will continue to hear these desperate stories of parents and their children who are not getting the support that they need.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that there is also a need for speech therapists, child psychologists, occupational therapists and other health professionals to support the special needs of those children in being diagnosed with autism in the first place?

**Maria Caulfield:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. This is absolutely about not just teachers, but the whole support staff. Our report calls on the Government to introduce a national autism strategy by the end of 2019, which should include training for school staff, the provision of a specialist curriculum for all pupils who need one and measures to reduce bullying and promote inclusion in schools. We also ask for an understanding of autism to be embedded in the education system, and we want ongoing training for teachers, including headteachers.

We are asking local authorities to collect data on children in their areas, because commissioners cannot plan a service if they do not know how many children are in need of it and on what part of the autistic spectrum those children sit. The needs of a high-functioning autistic child are very different from those of a child at the other end of the spectrum, so local authorities need to be collecting data so that they can adequately commission services.

We ask that Ofsted is required to monitor the implementation of the 2014 Act. One of the most striking pieces of evidence we heard in our inquiry was the admission of Ofsted inspectors that they do not always assess how children with autism are supported in schools when they carry out their inspections. If that is not being enforced, it is no wonder that schools are not getting the resources they need to support these children.

We also ask that local authority staff—this point was made in an intervention—as well as teachers receive training about the requirements of the 2014 Act. This is about more than teachers, who know that they need training, because a range of individuals involved in supporting children could also do with such training.

The Secretary of State came to our launch in Parliament last week. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle has met him since, and I know that my right hon. Friend is supportive of our report's findings. He has asked us to list the aspects of our report that we could introduce into policy, so we will certainly follow up on that. As a society, we are failing autistic children and their families, and that has a key implication for a huge number of people in our society.

During our inquiry on autism and education in England, we heard that too many families face an uphill struggle to obtain the help and support to which their children are entitled. Children with autism only have one childhood, so there is only one chance of getting it right. The impact of getting it wrong can be far reaching for the rest of their lives. We therefore urge the Government to look carefully at our report, and to develop a national autism and education strategy before the end of 2019 that will support local authorities to become more effective commissioners for children on the autism spectrum and ensure that schools are equipped to ensure that autistic pupils are supported in the way the existing law says they should be. In the words of a suffragette, Emily Wilding Davison, this is about “deeds not words”.

7.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) on securing this debate and I congratulate her and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on the excellent work they have done in this report. The debate is timely, following the recent all-party group inquiry on autism and education, where she co-chaired the work. I welcome the report and its recommendations. As we have heard, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State attended its launch last week, and I am grateful for this opportunity to set out the Government's position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes is right to highlight the fact that a diagnosis of autism can take a long time. I recognise how frustrating that can be for families and cannot stress enough that people do not need to wait for a formal diagnosis to secure support for their child—that is the message I want to send out from the Dispatch Box. The majority of children and young people with special educational needs or a disability will have their needs met within local mainstream early years settings, schools or colleges. As soon as it becomes apparent that a child may require extra help, the child's school should begin to provide support in line with the SEND—special educational needs and disability—code of practice.

The code of practice is clear that, if a local authority considers that it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for a pupil through an EHC—education, health and care—plan, it must conduct an EHC needs assessment. An assessment can be requested by the school, by the child or young person's parents, or by the young person themselves, if they are over school leaving age.

**Melanie Onn:** Can the Minister tell us how long it takes between a school identifying that a child has an issue and that child receiving the intervention and support that they require? In too many areas throughout the country, it is taking far too long.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** The hon. Lady raises an important point. It is taking far too long. I have been in the job only three weeks, but I have already heard that message from many parents who have made exactly that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes talked about the importance of training school staff effectively to support those with autism. With more than 108,000 children and young people in schools having been identified as having autism, I agree that it is vital that they are well supported in their education, so that they have the best possible chance of achieving their aspirations, living independently and finding sustainable employment. Having teachers who are confident and competent to support them is fundamental for children to thrive in school.

Autism presents particular challenges for teachers. It is not always easy to understand how the world appears for a child with autism and what might be driving particular behaviours, especially if someone has not come across autism before. For the child, that lack of understanding can lead to frustration, a failure to enjoy and engage with learning, and challenging behaviour, which can in some cases end in temporary or even permanent exclusion. That is why we are keen to ensure that education staff are well placed to support children and young people with autism.

Our approach to initial teacher training ensures that newly qualified teachers are equipped to support children with special educational needs, including those with autism. To be awarded qualified teacher status, trainees must satisfy the teachers' standards, which include a requirement that they have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with SEN, and are able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them. We have also launched a consultation to explore how we can support teachers at the early stages of their careers by strengthening the qualified teacher status.

I am pleased to say that we are currently in discussions to extend the Autism Education Trust contract to deliver autism training to existing education staff in early years settings, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes mentioned, as well as in schools and colleges. The Department has funded that training since 2012 and it has so far reached more than 150,000 people—not only teachers and teaching assistants but support staff such as receptionists, dining-hall staff and caretakers, thereby encouraging a whole-school approach to supporting pupils with autism.

It is important that teaching staff can access resources to help them to support children on a day-to-day basis in the classroom. We recently published a new resource, developed by ASK Research and Coventry University, which sets out evidence on effective approaches to supporting children and young people with special educational needs, including those with autism. We have also funded a school improvement programme to further support the embedding of good SEND practice in schools, including by working with local areas where the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission local-area inspection reports include significant concerns about school provision.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I welcome my hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box and am heartened to hear his positive response to my colleagues' report. Does he agree that it is important that Ofsted inspectors are trained to understand autism and the requirements of children with autism? They cannot fully report on and inspect educational establishments unless they themselves are trained, so will he ensure that all Ofsted inspectors receive training on autism?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** My right hon. Friend raises an important point and I shall try to address some of what she has said in the rest of my speech. It is important to think about who inspects the inspectors. Who is satisfied that they know and can identify autism?

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes also raised the need to reduce bullying. It is an issue that affects far too many autistic children and young people. The Government have always been clear that bullying of any kind is absolutely unacceptable and should never be tolerated. It is important for schools to respond promptly to support the bullied child and ensure that the bullying does not happen again. Last year, we published revised guidance for schools on how to prevent and tackle bullying in all its forms and to help them to create a safe and disciplined environment where pupils are able to learn and fulfil their potential.

The report also highlights the disproportionate exclusion from school of autistic children. It is really important that schools have an inclusive ethos, and they have a duty under the SEND code of practice to ensure that pupils with SEN are able to engage in the school's activities alongside pupils who do not have SEN. I know that exclusion, especially illegal "informal" exclusion, is a particular concern for the parents of autistic children. Under the contract with the Autism Education Trust, we are continuing to fund the excellent work of the National Autistic Society in providing advice and information on exclusions to parents and education professionals. Feedback shows that parents, in particular, value this service, helping them to understand their rights in situations where their child is at risk of exclusion, or has already been excluded.

None the less, we want to understand more about exclusions and their impact. That is why, in October 2017, the Prime Minister announced the launch of a review of exclusions practice and the implications for pupil groups that are disproportionately represented in the national statistics. The review will look at how schools use exclusion and how this impacts on all pupils, but in particular it will look at why the practice of exclusions is so varied and why some groups of children, including those with SEND such as autism, are more likely to be excluded than others. It will also be an opportunity to share best practice.

The 2014 SEND reforms were the biggest change to the system in a generation and placed a firm focus on involving young people and their families directly in planning their own support—

**Melanie Onn:** The Minister is being very generous this evening; I do thank him. I just want to take him back to the Prime Minister's review. When will that piece of work be published and when will we be able to look at the results of that review?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. In my speech, I will go on to address some of the issues—not just the Prime Minister’s review, but the Lenehan review and the Bercow work as well. We are looking very seriously at this matter, and the impetus from the Prime Minister and No.10 is only helping us to focus even more resources on making sure that we get this review right.<sup>1</sup>

As I said, the 2014 SEND reforms were the biggest change to the system in a generation and placed a firm focus on involving young people and their families directly in planning their own support, which is particularly relevant for children and young people on the autistic spectrum, where one size definitely does not fit all.

The Children and Families Act 2014 and the 0-25 SEND code of practice 2015 are built on best practice developed over many years. They are improving the support available to children and young people with SEND by joining up services for 0 to 25-year-olds across education, health and social care and by focusing on positive outcomes in terms of education, employment, housing, health and community participation. This increased focus on the transition to adulthood, employment and independent living is especially important for those with autism who often need additional support to manage transitions and enable them to achieve their aspirations.

I was pleased to see that the report on autism and education of the all-party group on autism found that the principles behind these reforms remain the right ones, and I agree that the challenge is now ensuring effective implementation of the legislation. The transition to education, health and care plans is being phased in over three and a half years and will be complete in March 2018, by which time all statements of SEN should be converted. I understand the pressures on local authorities and recognise that this is a challenging task. I am grateful for the hard work and commitment of all those involved. It is important that all local authorities meet this deadline and achieve it in a way that ensures that good-quality assessments are undertaken and that high-quality plans are in place. We know that there is more to do to ensure that the spirit of the reforms is fully realised, as they require a big change in culture, but we are seeing examples of good practice and are receiving positive feedback from parents of children with SEND. In 2016, the Department carried out a survey of more than 13,000 parents and young people who received an education, health and care plan in 2015; 62% agreed that the help and support described in their plan will achieve outcomes agreed for the child or young person, and 66% were satisfied with the process overall.

The report rightly highlights the importance of a clear accountability framework for these landmark reforms. I agree that it is important that the SEND reforms are

implemented as intended. It may be helpful to the House if I set out some ways in which we are supporting this.

We have introduced a new series of joint inspections by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission to see how well all local areas are fulfilling their responsibilities for children and young people with SEND, including those with autism. These new inspections are a key part of our accountability framework for the reforms and are driving change on the ground, particularly by improving joint leadership across education and health.

The Government have provided over £300 million to support local areas to implement the changes made to the SEND system. This includes £15,000 of grants for parent-carer forums in each local authority area and funding for 1,200 independent supporters to help families to navigate the education, health and care needs and planning process and to help local areas to improve practice in engaging children and young people. I recently confirmed the individual allocations to local authorities for further implementation funding for 2018-19, recognising the work that is still to be done to ensure a successful transition to the new system.

The Department has funded a SEND leadership programme and recently completed legal training to all councils and their health partners to ensure they are clear on their statutory responsibilities and to support better collaborative working. We have committed £23 million of additional funding to support strategic planning of high-needs provision. This will support local authorities in predicting local needs for education, health and care services for children and young people with SEN or disabilities, through the use of prevalence data and other sources of information. We are also working with NHS England to improve joint working at a local and national level through peer review, monitoring and challenge. For example, the 2017-18 NHS provider contract includes a requirement to report on meeting the six-week deadline for health input into education, health and care plans.

It is important that future support for all children and young people with autism and SEND more generally is targeted where it will be most effective. The recommendations of the report by the all-party parliamentary group on autism, alongside those of other recent reports—such as the Lenehan review of residential schools and colleges and the upcoming Bercow review, “Bercow: Ten Years On”, which is expected later this year—will inform our current consideration of our strategy for achieving this in 2018-19 and beyond.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.32 pm

*House adjourned.*

1. [Official Report, 20 February 2018, Vol. 636, c. 1MC.]



# Westminster Hall

Tuesday 6 February 2018

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

## Statutory PSHE Education

9.30 am

**Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of statutory personal, health, social and economic education.

In March 2017 the then Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening), announced her intention of putting relationships and sex education on a statutory footing, and of creating a power to make PSHE statutory in future, following further work and consultation. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provides for it to be made statutory in all schools in England through regulations. A call for evidence is running from December 2017 up to this month. I welcome that call for evidence, which gives us a chance to explore what world-class PSHE looks like, going forward into the 2020s. I hope that this debate will be a useful part of that process.

PSHE in this country has suffered on several fronts. It has been caught up in sterile debates about the difference between knowledge and skills, and about school freedom. It has also become a battleground because of its status as the home of sex and relationships education. It has been incorrectly associated with generic and sometimes obscure pet subjects—even origami. Often, we have lost sight of the fact that PSHE at its best supports the development of skills and attributes such as managing risk and taking responsibility, and the honing of critical skills that set young people up to succeed in other areas of the curriculum and in their wider lives. Surely that is what education is about.

Despite some of the cartoon battles that I have mentioned, there is a fair level of consensus about what PSHE includes: the knowledge and skills that young people need to stay safe—online and offline—healthy, and prepared for life. There should be programmes of study such as that prepared by the PSHE Association, with a spiral curriculum that is consistent with the ethos of the school and able to take account of the specific needs of the school's community. It can support children's mental and physical health, reduce the risk of drug and alcohol misuse, support financial capability, develop employability skills and provide emergency life-saving skills. Many schools provide excellent PSHE education, but others struggle. The fact that the subject is not mandated in all schools does not help; if there is a tussle for timetable space, the statutory subject will always win. Figures from the Department for Education itself show that time given to PSHE fell by 32% from 2011 to 2015, and the Select Committee on Education warned that that situation could still be deteriorating.

Mandatory or not, PSHE is of course not a magic bullet, but a clear position in the school curriculum, with support from inside and outside the education community, would be a good start. Giving PSHE statutory footing and enabling schools to act within a broad framework would make it easier for the Government to

deliver their stated aims of improving outcomes in safeguarding pupils against online harm, and in mental health. That is because PSHE is a complementary subject area: for example, relationships are influenced by other areas covered in PSHE and cannot be taught in isolation. Although parents, teachers and pupils support the subject, I believe that schools would welcome clarity on its status. A Government decision to establish mandatory PSHE must be the start of the work, not its end.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The hon. Lady is making a strong case and I congratulate her on securing this important debate. Does she agree that it is not appropriate for parents to be able to withdraw their children from some of the lessons? Should not the guidance and regulations make it clear that all pupils have the right to know the facts? There is a big difference between opinion and fact, and all children, regardless of faith or background, have the right to know the facts.

**Teresa Pearce:** I agree. Things work best when the home and the school work in partnership, not when they are in conflict. I am the mother of a teacher who often tells me about problems she has in trying to teach religious education in school. Some parents want their child removed from the lessons, because they do not want their child to be taught about other religions. That does not help. All children should be treated equally and have equal access to information, as the hon. Lady says. I completely agree.

One of the key benefits of PSHE, I believe, is that it increases academic attainment. A report by Pro Bono Economics in 2017 found that the provision of high-quality PSHE has a positive impact on young people's academic attainment. Moreover, a study of 200 social and emotional skills programmes, predominantly delivered through PSHE lessons, demonstrated an 11% improvement in young people's academic achievement. Encouragingly, evidence also showed that PSHE can have a positive impact on life chances, as it was the academic performance of the most disadvantaged children that improved by the greatest amount as the result of receiving high-quality PSHE.

PSHE does more than just add value to the qualifications that young people leave school with. Evidence suggests that it supports children in developing skills and characteristics such as teamwork, confidence, flexibility and resilience—all of which will enable them to achieve in their future lives and careers. I am sure that many hon. Members in the Chamber have had conversations with employers about young people leaving education with a handful of perhaps excellent qualifications, but no life skills. Many years ago when I was young I learned those life skills through such things as Saturday or holiday jobs, which are hard to get now. I learned what it was to be an adult by working with older women in Timothy Whites—whatever happened to them?—on a Saturday. Those things are not there for young people now; they need somewhere where we can teach them the life skills that they need to become the sort of employee that employers are looking for.

That is because the world of work that young people enter now is very different from the one I entered when I left school. People are not just looking for examination results; they want a candidate with the ability to adapt,

[Teresa Pearce]

innovate and work in partnership. Key leaders in business and industry support that view. The CBI has said that there is a need to focus

“not only on knowledge and skills, but also on the key attitudes and behaviours that are needed for success in life outside the school gates”.

That is where PSHE can certainly help. There is strong evidence that it improves academic attainment and young people’s prospects. I remind the Minister that at the Education World Forum in January he said:

“Preparing pupils to compete in an ever more competitive jobs market is the core purpose of schooling”.

I agree, and if he means what he says, as I believe he does, we need to be serious about attainment and social mobility, and about making provision for high-quality PSHE as a statutory requirement in schools.

Many other Members want to speak, and I do not want to cover every aspect of the subject, but I want to talk in particular about one area that is dear to my heart. In 2015 I tried to get a private Member’s Bill through Parliament—the Compulsory Emergency First Aid Education (State-funded Secondary Schools) Bill. Unfortunately it did not succeed, and the Government and the Minister did not support it. Perhaps the Minister was right and it was not the right place for the matter to be dealt with; perhaps the place for it is in PSHE. I should be happy to know whether he thinks that that is so.

I have worked hard on the issue for a number of years, as have many other Members of Parliament. The British Red Cross, the British Heart Foundation and St John Ambulance have all welcomed the call for evidence, believing that the teaching of first aid could sit happily within PSHE. The teaching of first aid, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation, as a mandatory component of statutory PSHE in both primary and secondary school, could be done in one hour a year, each year. It would ensure that all children and young people had the opportunity to learn that crucial life skill, building up knowledge and confidence over the course of their time in school. We know the statistics about first aid: only 5% of adults feel knowledgeable or willing to act in an emergency. Up to 59% of pre-hospital deaths from injury could have been prevented with basic first aid. More than 30,000 cardiac arrests occur out of hospital every year in the UK, and fewer than one in 10 people survive. If we could match the survival rates found in parts of Norway, where CPR is routinely taught in secondary schools, we could save around 5,000 lives per year in the UK.

As a mother of teachers, I understand that teachers are hard pressed and that their job is difficult, with long hours and little space, but I believe teachers are best placed to deliver the training, and they are not alone. They do not need specialist training to deliver it, because there are many quality, approved resources already being used in schools, such as those used by the three organisations I mentioned. The British Heart Foundation provides free CPR “watch and learn” training kits, which are in place in 66% of secondary schools. The British Red Cross provides “Life. Live it.” first aid for children and first aid learning for young people, with resources for primary and secondary schools. St John Ambulance provides free online access to its streamed sessions

under the banner, “The Big First Aid Lesson”, which many of us will be aware of. The most recent session reached 125,000 students in a single sitting, in addition to more traditional teaching resources.

First aid learning must be appropriate to the development level. The optimal age to start teaching cardiac compressions is around 12, but learning the symptoms of cardiac arrest and how to call for help can begin with much younger children. When they start school, children should be taught how to dial 999 and what happens when they do. That will impart a sense of confidence and responsibility to act. In the current climate, when we all, particularly young people, go out to bars, cinemas or concerts, there is an ever-present threat of terrorism. We need to turn young people into life-savers so that they do not become bystanders.

**Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab):** I hesitate to intervene, because my hon. Friend is making such a powerful case, but does she agree that as well as the practical benefits she is talking about in terms of saving lives, another benefit of first aid training for young people is that it builds up their personal confidence and their employability?

**Teresa Pearce:** I absolutely agree; that is almost the next point I was coming on to.

The training needs to be appropriate to the developmental level, but no matter how young children are, they can start learning about things such as what to do if they get a cut, how to put somebody in the recovery position and how to ring for help. Those are important things.

Beyond the process of learning those skills, as my right hon. Friend has just said, their inclusion in PSHE could have other benefits. The International Committee of the Red Cross believes:

“First aid is not just about techniques. It is an act of humanity”.

I agree. It is a key responsibility of citizenship. Teaching those skills will help create the next generation of good, caring citizens. It will teach character, something we all want to see happen. The Red Cross is surely right about that. Empowering young people with the ability to act and potentially save a life can transform how they feel about themselves and improve their self-esteem. It could also encourage more people to go into that career area and become paramedics. I have met many young people who, after having first aid training and perhaps joining St John Ambulance, went on to become paramedics and work in the national health service, because they found that they had a key skill and they understood its importance.

First aid training has wide support: 97% of teachers think it is vital for young people to learn essential skills in school, and 89% of people think that CPR should be taught in all schools in the UK. Some 95% of parents agree that first aid should be taught in secondary school, and 97% of 11 to 16-year-olds agree that they should be taught first aid, saying that they either definitely or probably should be taught it at secondary school.

We have a world that is fast changing—very different from the one I grew up in. It is a world full of threats online and the demands of social media. We hear a lot about the pressure young people are under. We know that young people need to learn about consent and about the terrorist threat. I am from a lucky generation;

I grew up after the second world war, in a time of peace. Young children now face constant threats—things we could never have dreamed they would face—and if we are to equip them for those threats, to deal with them in their everyday lives, we have a duty to ensure that in school every child is taught PHSE. It is a place to learn life skills that will equip them for the challenges ahead.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair):** If I am to be able to call all the hon. Members seeking to catch my eye, limiting speeches to around five minutes would be much appreciated.

9.45 am

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on an excellent speech on this important subject.

When I was visiting one of my local schools a week ago, I was handed a copy of all the subjects it teaches in its PHSE syllabus. I must say that I was impressed: it is a sensible, measured group of subjects, all dealing with issues that young people need to get to grips with, which will hugely help them as they embark on adult life.

I do not intend to speak for long, but I will talk about one specific issue I would like to see addressed in PHSE education. I will do so as a result of having been visited by one of my constituents, Denise Coates from Houghton Regis, who is a cancer survivor and an ambassador on the issue for the Luton and Dunstable hospital—perhaps the best-performing hospital in the country. As a cancer survivor, Miss Coates is passionate about the early diagnosis of cancer, something that I note absolutely fits with the priorities of the Department of Health and Social Care and its new 28-day target to diagnose cancer.

On the list of PHSE subjects, which I got from one of my local upper schools, I was pleased to see that children are taught “What is cancer?” That is an excellent first step. We know that around 2 million people are living with cancer in our country; in my clinical commissioning group area, Bedfordshire, there are about 2,300 cancer cases and 960 cancer deaths per year. Denise Coates has a simple and straightforward request, which, if we are already teaching children about what cancer is in PHSE, it is possible, practical and extremely worth while to grant: that children be taught about the importance of early detection of cancer for themselves and to spread that learning within their families. That is potentially life-saving. All of us in this room will have lost family members to cancer. I lost my stepsister, who had four children, at the age of 49 and my mother died of cancer when she was 66. I know I am not unusual in this room.

We know that the golden key to cancer is early detection. If we teach that to our children, both girls and boys, when they are young, they have no embarrassment about examining their own bodies and know what to look out for. If they take that message home to their families and ensure their families do likewise, we can do much better. We know there is a particular issue, for example, with many in the Asian community in this country presenting late for cancer. That is tragic, because sometimes it will be too late—the saddest words in the English language. That is something we could prevent.

I have a very simple request. I have written to the Department of Health and Social Care, as a member of the Select Committee on Health, to seek its support on the issue. I implore the Minister to listen to my representations this morning. I say to the schools in my constituency and in every constituency up and down this country, “If you are already telling children about cancer, just go that extra step. Talk to them about the incredible importance of early detection. It is life-saving. It could save their lives or their family members’ lives.” I pay tribute to my constituent Denise Coates, who first brought the issue to my attention. I am doing my part this morning to further her campaign.

9.49 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I did not expect to be called so early in the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on bringing this matter to the House for consideration. I will concentrate on two things in the short time I have: mental health and some of the projects undertaken back home in Northern Ireland.

I received, as did many other Members, a briefing from the Shaw Mind Foundation that outlined that mental health is currently only taught as an optional component of PHSE, despite 75% of mental illnesses starting before the age of 18 and data showing that three pupils in every classroom suffer from a diagnosable mental health condition. In addition, child suicide calls to ChildLine are at a record high, while self-harming among girls is up 68% and is getting worse every year. In her introduction, the hon. Lady referred to our needing focus. I think we need to focus on mental health—particularly children’s mental health. Despite those figures, the NHS currently spends 11% of its budget on mental health services, and we are always asking for more resources for that.

Research shows that pupils and parents strongly support further mental health education. In Northern Ireland, a scoping paper on adolescent mental health gives some shocking statistics. More than 20% of young people suffer significant mental health problems by the time they reach 18, and the demand on resources is higher than ever. Rates of mental ill health are estimated to be 25% higher in Northern Ireland than other parts of the United Kingdom, and suicide rates among those up to the age of 19 are disproportionately higher as well. The emotional wellbeing of children and young people is poor, and it takes almost 10 years between young people presenting first symptoms and getting support.

All those things tell us the story of where we are. I know Northern Ireland is not the Minister’s responsibility, but I want to state the facts, because they will hopefully add to the debate and will make other parts and regions of the United Kingdom understand where we are. There are also specific groups of children who are more likely to face discrimination in the realisation of their right to the highest attainable standards of healthcare, including those living in poverty and economically deprived areas and children in contact with the criminal justice system. All those things tell us we need to do more and to focus on this.

Research conducted by Ulster University on behalf of the Commission for Victims and Survivors found that almost 30% of Northern Ireland’s population suffer

[Jim Shannon]

from mental health problems. Most of that is down to the troubles. You will probably understand that better than most in the Chamber, Mr Robertson; your past membership of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee perhaps gives you a wee bit more knowledge.

The rates of suicide among under-19s are disproportionately higher in Northern Ireland compared with other parts of the UK. We need to ensure that people are trained and available to deal with that. The increase in prescribing antidepressants for under-16s is unfortunately happening in my constituency and I suspect others as well. I have spoken with teachers, youth workers, church volunteers and many parents who are concerned about children and how they handle the traumas in their lives. The overarching theme in their comments is that there is not enough support or key workers to help children in need of someone to talk to.

I will give an example of some small things we have been doing, which will perhaps add to the debate. A good friend of mine, who is not a member of my political party—I have tried many times to bring him over; I am working on it, and maybe someday I will persuade him—recently described to me a very small pilot he has going on in his local community group, of which he is chairperson. He told me he had managed to source funding to meet with six of the estate's troubled youths. A few of them have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and others have other problems, but all are crying out for attention.

He told me that he secured funding to take them on outings after they had small group discussions or were successful in small tasks. He gave the example that some of the kids were frightening an older lady by using her fence and garden as a racing hurdle of sorts. Instead of telling the boys off, he used class time to take them to help to tidy her garden, so they were invested in the work that was done. That was followed by a trip to McDonald's, which is usually something to look forward to. The boys discussed what they were thinking and how they felt with Big John—I will call him that, because that is what they know him as—who is trained to work with children and had the time to counsel them.

The scheme is open to only six youths at present, but the effect on their mental health and wellbeing could be the difference in how they function in their adult lives. We need more people who are trained and more funding available to allow schemes like that to run in all sectors of the community. I commend Big John and Big Catherine, who is also involved. They give up their own time to make it happen.

One in five children in Northern Ireland are hurting from mental health pain and need help as urgently as if they were bleeding. We would not withhold a bandage on the NHS and we cannot withhold this healing process either. I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead on bringing the issue forward. Other Members will contribute, but I believe that we need to focus on mental health, and PHSE classes should be only the first in a number of the steps that we need to take.

9.55 am

**Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Robertson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this

important debate. PHSE is one of the most important parts of our curriculum. Yes, we need to make sure that our children are given an academic education that enables them to compete with the rest of the world, but just as vital as academic skills are life skills. I am not saying that schools should replace parents in that regard, but they undoubtedly have a role to play.

It was nearly a year ago that the Government tabled amendments to what is now the Children and Social Work Act 2017 allowing for regulations requiring PHSE to be taught in all schools in England. The new curriculum containing PHSE is expected to be taught from September 2019, and the Department for Education launched a call for evidence on the issue last December, which is due to close in about a week's time. One question it asks those taking part is:

“Thinking about PSHE in primary schools”  
and secondary schools,

“what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why?”

I will put forward two things that should undoubtedly be taught as part of PSHE.

For one thing—I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead, with whom I have worked closely on this issue—first aid should be taught to all children. The statistics in this area are startling. According to the British Red Cross, only 5% of adults would feel knowledgeable, confident and willing to act in a first aid emergency. That is particularly worrying when considering that up to 59% of pre-hospital deaths from injury could have been prevented with basic first aid.

I should clarify that first aid is already on the PHSE programme of study, under the theme of health and wellbeing. However, because it is not a mandatory component of the programme, coverage is patchy. Some schools do not include it at all, so 60% of children have no first aid education whatever. When I met the Minister—I know he cares passionately about this subject—he rightly pointed out that the curriculum is full and that teachers have important things to focus on. Let me be clear: I am talking about one hour of training, once per year. That is the minimum we would need to teach children the basic first aid skills to become life savers. I do not think it is onerous to find one hour in our curriculum to give our children the knowledge to save lives.

I would suggest that teachers agree. A 2014 YouGov survey of 1,157 teachers found that 97% believed it vital for young people to learn essential first aid skills in school. Hon. Members may say that parents would surely not agree and that they would want their children to learn academic subjects. Not at all. The survey suggests that 95% of parents agree that first aid should be taught at secondary school. Nor do students think it is a waste of their time, with 97% of 11 to 16-year-olds agreeing that first aid should be taught at secondary school. Frankly, I am not surprised by that. Evidence suggests that learning first aid can improve people's life chances and empower them to step up and take responsibility, and that it provides them with a sense of contributing to their community. That is surely something we all want for our children, and it is achievable with one very simple change.

The second subject I would like to see taught in PHSE is weapons awareness education. We continue to have difficulty in tackling the scourge of knife crime,

but that is not to say that the Government are not taking action. I welcome steps such as minimum custodial sentences for repeated knife possession, but we need to do more on education so that we tackle the issue at both ends.

I have campaigned on this issue for some time now. I remember attending a weapons awareness lesson run in my constituency by a charity based in the neighbouring constituency of Clacton called Only Cowards Carry. That charity was set up by Caroline Shearer, a truly inspirational woman, in 2012 after her son, Jay, was fatally stabbed in my constituency. What is really interesting is that these hard-hitting lessons show people the danger of carrying blades and knives. They show that someone is far more likely to be the victim of a knife crime if they are carrying a knife themselves. Trust me: the lessons have a lasting impact. Students who walk into a lesson cocky and confident walk away startled at the brutality of the impact that knives can have.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very good point, particularly on gang violence and knife crime, which as he knows are a real scourge. There are fantastic organisations such as Lives Not Knives in Croydon, which offers to go into schools where young people have been victims of knife violence or lost relatives and loved ones. Does my hon. Friend agree that making such education part of PSHE nationally, so that it is assumed that everyone will have access to it, is a good way of tackling this issue? Too many schools do not want to invite these people in, as that would be to admit that they have a problem, and they are often in denial that they do have a problem. Knife crime is a problem for all teenagers in this country, particularly in our inner cities, and they all need to be made aware of it.

**Will Quince:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, because he has made a point I was about to come to. Charities provide this education and awareness, often free of charge or at very low cost—it is often sponsored or funded by the local police and crime commissioner—but they have an issue getting through the door of the schools, because the headteachers and subject leaders will say, “We don’t really have an issue with knife crime” or “We don’t want to say that we have an issue with knife crime.” Whether people have an issue with knife crime or not, and whether the issue is in school or not, we know that it is affecting constituencies up and down the country. Given the growth in cases of county lines activity, cuckooing and grooming of young people, in particular, with gang violence, which brings with it the drugs, knife crime and intimidation, it is absolutely right that this education should be part of the PSHE curriculum so that we teach pupils about the danger of carrying knives.

Just as with first aid education, I have regularly been told about the great demands on our curriculum, but again, I am talking about only one 45-minute lesson in year 9 or 10. That would not be a huge burden on the national curriculum. I am therefore asking the Minister for a total of one hour and 45 minutes as part of the curriculum.

PSHE provides an important opportunity to ensure that children walk away from school not just with the knowledge that they get from academic subjects, but

with those all-important life skills. First aid is an important life skill. We should commit to ensuring that every student receives training through PSHE, and not just to enable them to save lives, although that should be reason enough. By fostering self-esteem and confidence, we give students the opportunity to develop skills and we support their personal development. As I have said, the other part of their personal development on which we should focus is weapons awareness. Children should be left under no illusion whatever about the danger that comes with carrying a knife. As I said, the danger is to not just others but themselves.

I hope that the Government will commit to ensuring that children learn both subjects as part of the new curriculum, and that the Minister, who cares deeply about this issue, will be able to say that he is the Minister who made every child a life saver.

10.3 am

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I express my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce). This debate is so timely. As she rightly said, the Minister is very much in listening mode at the moment, because he is doing the consultation on the content of PSHE.

I want to echo what my hon. Friend was saying. PSHE, when it is good, is about life skills, confidence and resilience. Sadly, when we look at the most recent Ofsted research on PSHE, we see that it is not of a good enough standard, with 40% of schools rated inadequate or requiring improvement in their delivery of it. With all the topics now being debated in relation to the Children and Social Work Act 2017 making PSHE—and, at a younger age, relationship education—mandatory, I hope we can ensure that all schools are able to deliver a good standard, if not an excellent standard.

The Minister will not be surprised that I want to focus on a particular area, which is what relationship education for primary school children could cover. In the work that I have been doing for the past four years with charities, academics, professionals and, indeed, parents and survivors, looking at how we prevent child abuse, the key thing everyone has said is needed—I am glad that the Minister and the Government have listened—is proper relationship education for primary school children. Why is that important? Well, we know that one in 20 children will experience sexual abuse. The most recent statistics from the Office for National Statistics, for the year ending September 2017, show that of the sexual offences reported to the police, 37% are against children. That equates to 51,000 children a year. The Sex Education Forum says that 53% of children in schools have not learned how to recognise grooming or sexual exploitation. Of course, good relationship education for primary school children does not involve talking about sex; it involves talking about respecting yourself and other people and about what are appropriate and inappropriate relationships. Then, when children get older and go to secondary school, we would of course start talking about sex and consent.

Today is Safer Internet Day, so it is appropriate for me to bring into the debate the new phenomenon of online abuse. The statutory sex and relationship guidance in place at the moment is 18 years old. I do not want to

[Sarah Champion]

age anyone in this Chamber, but the younger generation are growing up in an online world; we mainly grew up in the real world, for want of a better phrase. We do not really understand the 24-hour pressures that young people are under. In addition, we are only starting to recognise how abusers use the internet. I went to my local police force and watched officers trying to tackle the online grooming and then abuse of children. One in three children is now a victim of cyber-bullying. We need also to consider peer-on-peer abuse. One in five indecent images shared online was taken by the child themselves, according to the National Crime Agency, and 40% of child sex abuse is carried out by other, usually older children. That is why relationship education is important. It is not just about protecting children; it is about teaching children what is right and wrong in relation to others.

Of course, abuse is not just sexual: 82% of 13 to 17-year-olds have seen something hateful online in the past year. That means something targeting people or communities because of their gender, transgender identity, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity or religion. RSE and PSHE prevent lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender phobia. That is a big issue, particularly online. Two out of five LGBT pupils were never taught about LGBT issues, and only one in five was taught about safe sex in same-sex relationships. This education is about teaching all children to respect others, but also about teaching LGBT children about their own choices and that they are okay.

Good sex and relationship education has a protective function. According to the Sex Education Forum, children who receive such education choose to have sex later in life, have fewer unplanned pregnancies, are more likely to use protection and are less likely to have sex against their will.

There is an argument that sex education, in particular, but also relationship education and PSHE in general, should be left to parents. I see the two forms of education going hand in hand, but I also point out that one in five parents feels ill equipped to teach children about the digital age. Half of young people living at home say that their parents know only some of what they are doing online. Sadly, we also need to reflect on the fact that nine out of 10 abused children know their abuser and 80% of child abuse happens in the child's or the abuser's home. What I am saying is that although we must of course respect the right of parents to make their choices, the state has a statutory duty to protect all children, and this debate is showing very clearly that we want all children to have the life skills to be able to flourish.

I therefore have three specific asks for the Minister in relation to PSHE and relationship education for primary school children. One is that they follow what the debate is showing and that the content is broad ranging. The second is that the Minister make available the necessary resources so that teachers have both the time and the skills—or the ability to draw on external agencies—to deliver that broad-ranging curriculum. Thirdly, I ask that there is protected time—one hon. Member has already asked for one hour and 45 minutes—in specific lessons or a commitment to weave these life skills within all lessons. For example, in maths we could be talking about credit cards and balancing our budgets.

I thank the Minister. I know that he is in listening mode, and I hope that “listening mode” translates into the PSHE that we are all looking for.

10.10 am

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I will do my best to get the time keeping back on track, as I am conscious that there are a few speakers remaining.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce). I have been proud to support her work over the years on emergency life-saving skills in schools. I will focus on that topic briefly.

I am conscious that the Schools Minister has a list of about 150 subjects that colleagues have raised with him over the years as the single most important subject that should be added to the national curriculum in some way. On many of the occasions that I attempted to add to that list, he shared some of those subjects on there. He has an unenviable task.

Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), I want to focus specifically on the importance of emergency life-saving skills. Those who have already spoken on this subject have talked about many of the statistics, but I want to focus on a few. There are 30,000 cardiac arrests a year outside of a hospital, for which the survival chances are 12%—a disgraceful 12%, which is one of the lowest rates in the world. For every minute that passes in which somebody is not given help, their chances of survival fall by a staggering 10%. Even worse is the fact that 10,000 cardiac arrests are witnessed, but those witnesses do not have the confidence to do anything for fear they will make it worse, but they can do no worse than do nothing. I understand that, because as a young boy I found my father. I did my best, purely based on what I think I had seen on “Coronation Street”. Luckily some passers-by came. They did their best. Sadly we lost my father, but it showed me that these statistics are real.

We are simply asking for a one-hour session. As was mentioned, that one hour to create a generation of life savers could save 5,000 lives a year. Those are real people—the people that we represent. They are people of all ages, not just older people. In my constituency a couple of weeks ago, Matt Fiddes found his two-year-old son. He performed CPR and saved his two-year-old son. This captured the imagination of the public. Unsurprisingly, the good people of Swindon expect me to help deliver on this. I have lobbied the new Secretary of State for Education. I will continue to chase this. This was the subject that first secured the required 100,000 signatures for a parliamentary e-petition. Some 95% of parents support it. It is rare in politics to unite all sides of the House and 95% of parents. The British Heart Foundation, the Red Cross and St John Ambulance are poised and ready. They have the materials and videos. My constituency office has done the training sessions with the videos. They are fantastic. They are poised to go.

This is an absolute win-win situation for everybody. It would slot perfectly into PSHE. It will make a real difference. I know that the Minister understands the importance of this and he has encouraged schools to do this. Let us make that a given. Let us create that generation of life savers. Let us genuinely make a difference.

10.13 am

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Robertson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this debate and setting it out in the manner in which she did.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that this is obviously an England-only debate, with education being devolved to the Scottish Parliament, so it might seem somewhat strange—despite the fact the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has contributed—to see a Scottish MP engaging in today's debate beyond our third party responsibilities. However, this is an issue that I feel strongly about and there are undoubtedly things we can learn from each other about the content and delivery of our curriculums.

PSHE not only helps children and young adults live healthier physical lives, but it also promotes better mental health. In addition to helping youngsters gain valuable transferable skills to help prepare them for life and work, PSHE also provides pupils with the relevant skills and knowledge to ensure they are safe online. That is an extremely important skill, given how accessible the internet and social media are to the current generation of young people, as I am finding out with my 11 and seven-year-old daughters.

It is also vital to note that relationship and sex education is a fundamental component of PSHE, and one that I am particularly passionate about. If it is implemented effectively and across the board, I firmly believe that we can help create positive and respectful relationships between boys and girls, which will help to tackle and eliminate sexist attitudes before they turn more violent later.

I received a report last week from the National Education Union and UK Feminista, which conveys the extent of the problem of sexism in our classrooms. The report highlighted that sexual harassment is prevalent in schools, with over a third of female students being subjected to some form of sexual harassment. Sexist language is too often dismissed as banter, with two-thirds of female students and teachers experiencing or witnessing it on a weekly basis. Less than a quarter of our female students think that their school takes sexism seriously. Those stats present a worrying picture of what life is like for too many female students.

Education is meant to be a place where our children learn, socialise and find their way in the world. Our education system should not be a place where sexist attitudes and behaviours, often fomented at home, are born and/or reinforced. One respondent to that report spoke about the sexual harassment she is experiencing:

“Some of the boys make comments on a lot of the girls in our years bodies and the girls just have to ignore it because no one thinks it's a big deal. The boys also slap the girls butts and touch their breasts without any consent.”

It is shameful that we have allowed that sort of behaviour to go largely unchallenged in many of our schools. If we fail to educate in order to tackle and prevent sexism in classrooms, as sure as night follows day, we risk these behaviours manifesting later in life.

The Scottish Government's “Equally Safe” strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls addresses the need to eliminate the systematic and

deep-rooted inequality that women and girls face in their daily lives. The report completed by the National Education Union and UK Feminista shows that many of these deep-rooted behaviours are established very early at school. Sexism in schools is endemic, but not inevitable. The UK Government and others have to make PSHE a statutory part of the curriculum to ensure that every student receives education about the importance of positive, healthy and equal relationships. We need to get serious about adopting a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment.

There is undoubtedly more that we in Scotland can do in this area, but I am proud of some of the progress that has been made by the Scottish Government and others. Through the curriculum for excellence, personal and social education is a subject that covers aspects of planning for choices and changes, substance misuse, relationships, sexual health and parenthood. Following a report completed by the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee, the Scottish Government have outlined their intention to complete a review of PSHE. I hope that the Scottish Government are ambitious in this review, meet the calls made by young people during the consultation and use the review to lead the work into creating an inclusive school environment founded on the values of respect, inclusivity and equality.

The case for PSHE is undisputed. The evidence has been provided on the benefits that PSHE has in promoting healthy living, economic wellbeing and solidifying positive relationships. The statutory status for PSHE is supported by 85% of business leaders, 88% of teachers, 92% of parents, 92% of pupils, the Children's Commissioner for England—I could go on and on, as the list is extensive. The current system is helping to foster behaviours that can grow more violent later in life. This debate is about introducing PSHE into all classrooms. It is about equipping our students with the skills, attributes and knowledge to prepare them for later in life. However, this debate has also been about the importance of sustaining a positive relationship between boys and girls, helping to eliminate sexist attitudes from our schools and preventing these behaviours from growing more violent.

Sadly, on average two women are killed by a partner or ex-partner each week. The attitudes that lead to this murderous behaviour must be addressed. We cannot leave it to an incremental shift in societal attitudes over generations to resolve this issue. We must address this head-on through a gender-based violence prevention education framework. Statutory PSHE is the ideal vehicle for this and I urge the Minister to get on and implement it.

**Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair):** I am looking to call the Front-Bench speakers at 10.30 am, so that leaves about five minutes each for the two remaining speakers.

10.19 am

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this important debate. As I considered my contribution, I was struck by a story that I was recently told by a pupil of a local school in my constituency, leading me to focus specifically on the provision of first aid training in schools.

[Preet Kaur Gill]

When visiting St Paul's School for Girls, I met a student who had recently witnessed a woman collapse in the street in front of her. Rather than panic, as I fear I and many of us in this room may have done, the young student displayed great maturity, helping the woman into the recovery position while also applying pressure to a head wound that she had sustained. As it turned out, the woman was a refugee who did not speak any English, leaving her unable to explain what was happening to passers-by. By having the wherewithal and composure to carry out those actions, the student helped to save the life of a woman who had in fact suffered a heart attack. For her actions, the student was later given a richly deserved commendation by local emergency services.

That student was able to provide the life-saving assistance that she did only because she had studied first aid as part of her PSHE course at school, enabling her to recognise what was happening and implement vital assistance before the emergency services arrived. How many of us in this room could say that we would be able to do the same? Would we be able to step in and offer that vital first-response assistance until the professionals arrived, thinking how terrible the situation was or wishing there was someone there to help?

The "Every Child a Lifesaver" coalition, which is made up of the British Red Cross, the British Heart Foundation and the St John Ambulance, is campaigning to make first aid a mandatory component of a new, statutory PSHE curriculum, and I would like to offer it my wholehearted support. This is not a big commitment. Just one hour a year over the course of their time in school could provide students with the essential skills, including CPR, that they need to save a life. The statistics are irrefutable. Only 5% of adults would feel knowledgeable, confident and willing to act in a first aid emergency. More than 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur in the UK every year, and fewer than one in 10 people survive, and most—around 80%—out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur in the home, while the immediate initiation of CPR can double the chances of survival in some cases. Organisations such as those I have mentioned provide all the necessary tools to teach these vital skills, and it is up to us as legislators to give them the platform that they need to impart their knowledge to today's students.

There are more than just the obvious life-saving benefits to students of statutory first aid training. First aid training develops leadership skills, decision making, resilience and the ability to cope with adversity, supporting personal development and employment skills. It can improve young people's life chances and empower them to step forward and take responsibility, while providing them with a sense of contributing to the community within our shared society. It will also ensure universal access to this essential knowledge and life skill, improving health inequalities across all communities and at every socioeconomic level.

The Department for Education consultation on making PSHE, including first aid, compulsory is open until only the 12th of this month, so I hope that this debate will raise the profile of this important decision and encourage as many as possible to take part in the consultation, so as to ensure that more children are able to act as my constituent did, and feel confident enough to step in and provide what could prove to be life-saving assistance to a person in need.

10.23 am

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship for the first time, Mr Robertson.

I congratulate my colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce), on securing this debate and the excellent case she made. I will start with the immortal words of those bards of New York City—I know you are a big fan, Mr Robertson—Salt-N-Pepa:

"Let's talk about sex baby,

Let's talk about you and me,

Let's talk about all the good things and the bad things that may be."

That was a really big song when I was growing up. I was aware that people were talking about sex all around me, and that there were good and bad things, but I never heard anything about it at school. That was where I looked to be educated about the challenges of the world, but I never heard anything about it. I could conjugate lots of Latin verbs, but I certainly did not understand this.

The point is that children are already getting a broad PSHE education. They get it from their friends and siblings, where it is no doubt patchy at best, from the television, which is no doubt worse, and—this should probably make us collectively shudder—from the internet. The subject is out there. Children and young people hear words and research them, but goodness knows what they are shown. I feel that we have a duty to equip our young people with the facts of life and the critical reasoning skills to make good decisions when they negotiate the weird and wonderful opportunities that the world presents them. I believe that to not do so is to let them down.

Two years ago in Nottingham, thanks to the excellent work of Catherine Kirk and Councillor Sam Webster, we introduced a sex and relationship education charter. We went to our schools and got them to sign up, and 70% of them currently are. With two years' worth of research, we can now say that staff feel more confident in delivering good lessons, pupils have shown maturity and their participation has improved, and in many schools zero parents have chosen to opt out. That context will change as we move on to a statutory footing, but some of the learning that we have in Nottingham will stand us in good stead.

We seek to equip our young people to pass what I call the "Friday night test". When they are out and about on a Friday night, wherever they may be, we will not be with them, their teachers will not be with them and, most of the time, their parents will not be with them. In those moments of challenge, whether about money, alcohol or sex, have we equipped them to make good decisions about the different risks and benefits? If we have not, we have failed them. In researching this contribution, I saw that a Terrence Higgins Trust survey shows that 70% of young people say they that they have not learned about issues regarding consent. Deary me, what an indication; it is like sticking them in a car on the M1 but not having taught them how to drive.

We need to educate our young people about broader PSHE issues, and we need to do it well. Again, SRE is a pretty good example. That same piece of work by the Terrence Higgins Trust found that more than half of

our pupils received relationships and sex education just once a year or less, and—this is the key point—half of our young people rated the RSE that they received in school as either poor or terrible. They are judging that against the standard of what they see in the real world. They are voting, although not quite with their feet, because I suspect that they do not have much choice. We cannot kid them. There is a big, wide world out there and we have to equip them properly.

That starts with properly resourcing our teachers so that they can engage confidently on the wide range of issues. We should also be saying that schools should not be doing this on a termly drop-down day, which students miss if they are away or think is a day when they do not have to contribute as much. Instead, this subject should be woven through the curriculum. I know that the Minister has lots of asks for an hour here and an hour there, but the best way to aggregate them is to weave them through on a daily basis. Our children will be faced with these decisions every day, so let us put it in their education like that too.

Low expectations are a great challenge in my community. This is a gendered issue, and that is worth reflecting on this 100th anniversary of some women getting the vote. There is a perception—this is the sort of cod psychology that young people are exposed to on social media—that we get the love that we think we deserve. Through proper PSHE and SRE for our young people, I want our young women to understand that if they put into the world, they can get good things back. They should expect good things of how men treat them and how their friends treat them. At the moment, that does not happen enough, and I hope that this is seminal moment to change things.

I want to finish by saying that on 28 June—the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) asked for an hour and 45 minutes of termly time, but I am just asking for half a day of the hard-pressed Minister's time—Nottingham will celebrate our first sex and relationship education day. The schools, city council staff, statutory agencies and voluntary agencies will come together to celebrate what we have done and to encourage the whole community about their responsibilities. We will issue some of our research and guidance, and some of the things that parents could do to challenge the things that they are not comfortable with.

**Andrew Selous:** The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech with many good points. Does he favour changing the name to “relationships and sex education”—to switch those two words round—as many of us think that relationships should come before the sex?

**Alex Norris:** I have to say that I do not get excited about the alphabet soup. In preparing for today, I was desperately trying to work out whether it was PHSE or PSHE. As long as the content is there and our young people are getting it, you can call it whatever you want—I am very relaxed about that.

That event is on 28 June. Hopefully, Nottingham will demonstrate once again that it has been a model for what we are seeking to do as a nation, and I hope that during the consultation we can draw on some of that experience too.

**Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair):** I will leave two minutes at the end of the debate for the mover of the motion to wind up.

10.29 am

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I too thank the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) for introducing this important debate and for her insightful opening speech. I was an English teacher for over 20 years before being elected in 2015, so I have an interest in the debate and I will contribute from that perspective.

Personal, health and social education is extremely important, as I understand because I had the opportunity to deliver that part of the curriculum. Alongside many other subjects and activities, it has its place in the curriculum in helping to prepare our young people for their future in a positive way. Its importance in Scotland is evident in Education Scotland's national review, which my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) mentioned. We understand the importance of developing curricula to suit individual contexts and meet our young people's needs, and of early intervention for making a big difference to the risk of young people developing mental health problems.

I listened carefully to hon. Members' speeches and the range of areas that they would quite rightly and justifiably like to be included in PHSE education, such as cancer education, which the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) mentioned; mental health, for which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made a plea; first aid, whose importance the hon. Members for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), and for Colchester (Will Quince) talked about; weapons awareness, which the hon. Member for Colchester also mentioned; relationship education and online safety, which the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) talked about; tackling sexism and sexual violence, which my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North discussed; and the importance of relationship education, which the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) talked about.

All those areas are, of course, extremely important in our young people's development—who could possibly disagree with any of them?—but we must guard against treating personal, social and health education as an entity all on its own. The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead reminded us that it cannot be treated in isolation. The valuable lessons that we hope to impart to our young people must be built into the fabric of our schools and, we hope, of our communities and country, which is a point that the hon. Member for Nottingham North also made. Those lessons include respect for ourselves, a sense of self-worth, respect for others, the importance of understanding difference in all its forms, the value of communication and the importance of kindness. We may expect all those things to be present in our PSHE lessons, but they must also form the backbone of our schools' ethos and be displayed by school staff every single day to set an example.

The many demands on time in the school day mean that young people are lucky if they get more than one formal PSHE lesson each week, as all hon. Members present will know. In Scotland, PSHE is woven through and embedded in the curriculum for excellence and its focus on life skills. Learning and teaching can take place in a variety of ways and contexts. The value of experiences in the home, in our leisure time and in extra-curricular activities also offer a rich seam for young people to learn life skills.

[Patricia Gibson]

At the school where I was teaching just before being elected, every year group would have one or two days completely off-timetable once a year. They would be taken to a different part of the school and they would rotate around workshops. They would get talks and practical workshops on first aid, and people—professionals and victims—would come in to talk about recovery from alcohol and addiction. Those are ways to focus on areas that headteachers and communities are concerned about.

We have all seen reports on television and in newspapers of all the things that people—with great justification—expect young people to be taught at school, such as internet safety, sexual health, relationship education, financial education, careers education with work and CV skills, road safety, self-awareness, positive thinking, mindfulness, gambling awareness, awareness of eating disorders, how to cultivate good mental health, cyber-bullying, strategies for coping with bullies, resilience, leadership, healthy nutrition, the importance of sleep, good study habits, and even scepticism. I could go on for about half an hour, but I will not—I think I have made my point. Nobody here would say that any of those topics is not important. They are all important, and they are all considered essential in the PSHE curriculum, but they cannot all be accommodated unless young people have a PSHE lesson every single day. As far as I am aware, no school does that.

Even if a school wanted to formally timetable PSHE every single day, what would it remove from the curriculum to do that? I suggest that we need to think of PSHE as the thread running through our entire curriculum. As an English teacher, I had the privilege of exploring important life lessons through literature, such as the importance of family and friendship; the drive for revenge; the need for reflection; the courage to battle through diversity; the importance of standing up for our beliefs, even if that sometimes means standing alone; and the power of forgiveness—all sorts of things. As an English teacher, I was in a privileged position. Other subject teachers might not have such a rich tapestry to work with, but all school staff, not just teaching staff, have an opportunity to teach by example the most basic life lessons and requirements, such as kindness, self-respect and an awareness of the needs and difficulties of others. We must not be tempted to confine those lessons to PSHE in a way that is neither sustainable nor desirable.

We are all PSHE teachers—especially parents. As the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead said, schools and homes work best when they work together, and as the hon. Member for Rotherham said, it is the job of schools and parents to reinforce positive messages and positive behaviour. I accept that that is a challenge for parents, who are raising children in a world that has changed so much since they were children. As the hon. Ladies pointed out, the world is changing rapidly and because of that, school and home need to work all the more closely together.

PSHE deserves its place in the curriculum as somewhere for the proper discussion and exploration of all sorts of important developmental and personal growth issues. However, to be completely honest, our entire curriculum is PSHE whether we are in a maths, English or PSHE classroom. It is not separate. It is wound into the very

fabric of all the life lessons and academic lessons we want our young people to learn to live successful and happy lives.

10.37 am

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) not only for eloquently introducing this debate but for all her tireless work in trying to legislate for compulsory emergency first aid education. I also thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have made valuable contributions to this debate, not just today but for a number of years—long before I became involved.

Despite being late to the debate, I was proud to lead the push from the Opposition Front Bench with my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) for the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to include statutory personal health, social and economic education, including relationship and sex education. From debates in Committee and on Report, we ended up with a broad cross-party consensus—something that is rarely seen in the House, although it is reflected in this Chamber. It was also reflected in the proposals of the then Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening), to make elements of PSHE mandatory in all schools and to make the new subjects—relationships education and relationships and sex education—mandatory at primary and secondary level respectively.

Hon. Members' wide-ranging contributions are testament to the breadth and scope of PSHE. They will be pleased to know that I will not focus on or rehash the pertinent points already made in this debate. As we all know, the Department's consultation is due to close on 12 February. The intention is to teach the new sex and relationships education curriculum from September 2019, but no date has been given for the roll-out of statutory PSHE, nor has any commitment been given that PSHE will include SRE.

As hon. Members have highlighted, the introduction of statutory PSHE is backed by a plethora of organisations. When it is taught well, children enjoy the lessons and it is effective in helping them to lead healthier lives, both mentally and physically. It builds resilience and gives them a better understanding of the world around them. It helps them to develop empathy skills, work with others, communicate, think critically, cope with setbacks and keep themselves and others safe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) outlined.

The Government's commitments were made under a different Secretary of State. The new Secretary of State was chair of the all-party group on social mobility when it published a report that challenged the Government to recognise in their educational policy that

“social/emotional ‘skills’ underpin academic and other success—and can be taught”.

Is he willing to rise to his own challenge, or has his thinking changed?

Will the Minister advise us whether the Department has any dates at all in mind for implementing regulations for the roll-out of statutory PSHE? I understand that he may find that difficult, because for PSHE to be taught

effectively, the Government must address the hash they have made of our education system more widely. Giving teachers and schools more to do when they are struggling with depleted budgets, ongoing recruitment and retention will not necessarily yield the right results.

Just last week, we found out that Ministers had missed their own teacher recruitment targets for five years in a row. There are 10,000 fewer secondary school teachers than needed, and nearly 35,000 teachers left the profession in 2016. Last year, 500 headteachers wrote to the Prime Minister to ask her to reverse £3 billion of cuts. Local schools are sending begging letters to parents for essentials such as paper and glue. Schools are facing cuts for the first time in 20 years. If the Minister is going to tell us—I hope he is—that the Government remain committed to statutory PSHE, will he also tell us how they intend to fix the education system that they have broken, to equip it for any statutory roll-out of SRE or PSHE?

Teachers tell me that PSHE is seen as an add-on, typically taught for an hour every fortnight by someone whose job it is not, or by an outside agency brought in to tick the box. What they tell me is backed up by evidence from the Department for Education's own data, which shows that time spent teaching PSHE fell by 32% between 2011 and 2015. They also tell me that what statutory SRE and PSHE need is specialist teachers, that it needs to be part of the overall teacher training programme, and that any qualified teachers whose role will include teaching it need to be appropriately equipped and resourced—a view shared by the National Education Union. Will the Minister tell us what budget the Department has set aside for that?

If you will permit me, Mr Robertson, I would like to use my final few minutes to speak about what I see as absolutely the most valuable part of PSHE: sex and relationships education. I echo the powerful points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham about the subject. From my former career as a child protection social worker, the details are etched on my brain—I wish they were not—of every single child I ever worked with who suffered sexual abuse. I remember working with children who had been abused and teaching them about their personal areas—the areas that no one has a right to touch. I taught them what to do if someone did—if it happened at home or at school, if the perpetrator was an adult or if they were harmed by another child. Not a single child I worked with had ever been taught that in school or by their parents. Many of the dedicated teachers I met along the way asked me for my materials so that they could replicate that learning in their classrooms.

Time and again I have heard the argument made that it should be up to parents to take responsibility for teaching their children issues covered in SRE and PSHE, but the fact is that not all parents and carers feel able to. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), whose musical tastes we now know a little more about, pointed out that parents and carers cannot be with their children 24/7. As in all school subjects, the best results are achieved by parents and school working together, where what is taught at school is reciprocated at home and vice versa—a point made by my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead, and for Rotherham.

I have been out of child protection practice for four years now, but things have certainly not changed. A recent Sex Education Forum survey found that 50% of young people were not taught at primary school how to get help if they experienced unwanted touching or sexual abuse. I am not saying for one second that child sexual abuse would be eradicated if such teaching were introduced, but I am sure that some of the children I worked with might have been able to tell someone sooner, stopping the abuse from being repeated. The teenagers I worked with might have been able to spot the signs of grooming or the fact that one of their friends was at risk.

I know acutely the heartache and scars that sexual abuse can leave. Even if introducing PSHE with SRE stops that from happening to just one child, it will be totally worth it. That is the reality of our debate, above anything else. We need this provision now, not in 2019 or at some other date, and not rolled out piecemeal. Viewing the matter in that context should make the new Secretary of State treat the failure to provide statutory PSHE, including SRE, with the urgency that it deserves. I sincerely hope that the Minister will answer all my questions and those of other hon. Members, and that he will confirm that the Government are ready to show some leadership in developing this long-awaited and vital part of our children's curriculum.

10.46 am

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this debate and on her powerful speech.

The teaching of high-quality personal, social, health and economic education is a very important issue, and I welcome the opportunity to set out the Government's position on it. We believe that the education system must prepare all pupils for life in modern Britain. Schools have a key role to play in developing rounded young people who can navigate the challenges of the modern world with confidence. They should teach pupils a foundation of knowledge to use and apply in a variety of contexts, allowing them to thrive and develop and preparing them to become fully engaged citizens and contributors to society.

The context of this debate is that standards in our primary and secondary schools are rising. Some 1.9 million more pupils are in good or outstanding schools today than in 2010. The attainment gap between children from poorer and wealthier backgrounds has closed by 10% since 2011. The proportion of pupils taking at least two science GCSEs has risen from 63% in 2010 to 91%. Children's reading is improving. I agree with one point made by the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson): reading literature introduces children to a range of emotional and life experiences.

We also know that high-quality PSHE and age-appropriate relationships and sex education are important in contributing to keeping pupils safe and healthy. Technological advances have brought great opportunities, but young people today also face unprecedented pressures as they navigate the digital world. Effectively planned PSHE programmes can provide young people with the necessary knowledge to manage risk and build

[Nick Gibb]

understanding of dangers such as drug and alcohol misuse and cyber-bullying, as well as supporting them to enhance their own wellbeing. Schools are encouraged to deliver PSHE as an integral part of their duty to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. Many schools already use their curriculum and school day to support pupil wellbeing, for example through their PSHE curriculum and through a range of extracurricular activities.

We know that these subjects are important, but they also need improving, which is why we have committed to a programme of reform. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires the Secretary of State for Education to place a statutory duty on all primary schools to teach relationships education and on all secondary schools to teach relationships and sex education, or RSE. The Act also gave the Government the power to make PSHE a compulsory subject to be taught in all state-funded schools, subject to further careful consideration.

As part of our reforms, in March 2017 we set out in our policy statement key areas that we anticipate that relationships education, and relationships and sex education will focus on, for example, teaching pupils about different types of relationships, and about unhealthy and healthy relationships, both on and offline. That is likely to include consideration of issues such as boundaries, appropriate behaviour, consent and respect for others, which were powerfully raised by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). She is right about protecting young children, and I agree that relationships education at primary school should equip pupils with age-appropriate knowledge, so that they can keep themselves safe.

Teaching about friendships and family relationships in primary school forms the building blocks for RSE in secondary school. Pupils should understand their own and others' relationships, as well as the impact that relationships have on mental health and wellbeing. This knowledge will support pupils in making informed decisions.

As part of our reforms, we are also working closely with experts to determine what PSHE should look like in the context of statutory relationships education and RSE, and we will consider age-appropriate content and guidance. PSHE is currently a non-statutory programme in maintained schools. Schools are encouraged to teach PSHE, and this is outlined in the introduction to the national curriculum framework document, which was published in 2013. PSHE can encompass many areas of study, and in considering whether it should be made compulsory, it is important to balance the need for schools to have freedom and flexibility to tailor their local PSHE programme to reflect the needs of their pupils.

As set out in the policy statement, we could expect mandatory PSHE to cover several broad pillars, for example healthy bodies and lifestyles, including issues such as cancer, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). PSHE could also include issues such as keeping safe, puberty, drugs and alcohol education, healthy minds, including emotional wellbeing and mental health, economic wellbeing and financial capability, and, lastly, careers education, preparation for the workplace and making a positive contribution to society.

Many schools already teach PSHE well, and we want to understand how they do that in a way that complements their broader curriculum. In some primary and secondary schools, sex education is also taught as part of PSHE. The teacher voice omnibus survey report, published in October last year, explored schools' approaches to PSHE and SRE. The vast majority of senior teachers—85%—said that their school taught both PSHE and SRE. Most of the others—8%—said that they taught PSHE only.

Schools are free to use PSHE to build, where appropriate, on the statutory content already outlined in the national curriculum, the basic school curriculum and in statutory guidance on areas such as drug education, financial education, SRE, and the importance of physical activity and diet for a healthy lifestyle. Teachers have the freedom to address the areas that are most relevant to their pupils, drawing on evidence, good practice and advice from professional organisations. We encourage organisations to develop materials for schools in their area of expertise.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire and others, including the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead and my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester (Will Quince) and for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), raised the issue of first aid. There is nothing more important than keeping children and staff safe, which is why we have put in place a duty requiring schools to support all children's medical needs, and we have set up a scheme so that schools can buy defibrillators at a reduced price. Schools can teach emergency first aid and life-saving skills in a variety of ways, for example through the wider curriculum, through assemblies or through PSHE, and we have given headteachers more freedom than ever before to shape the curriculum to the needs of their pupils.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nick Gibb:** I will not give way to the hon. Lady, if she does not mind; I want to cover other people's contributions.

We also encourage teachers to draw upon high-quality resources in the classroom, including guidance on first aid and emergencies from the British Red Cross, St John Ambulance and the British Heart Foundation. The British Heart Foundation provides free teaching kits to secondary schools on CPR. The kits are reusable and no trained instructor is required. Similarly, St John Ambulance and the British Red Cross provide free resources to schools on first aid, and they can also provide specialist trainers to teach first aid in schools.

In the last few years, there have been calls from many organisations, including parent bodies, to make PSHE a compulsory subject, and those calls have been echoed in reports from Committees in the House. We have made it clear that we want to provide all young people with a curriculum that ensures they are prepared for adult life in modern Britain. Good schools establish an ethos, a behaviour policy and a curriculum that teach children about the importance of healthy, respectful and caring relationships. They recognise that healthy, resilient and confident pupils are better placed to achieve academically and to go on to be successful adults.

An Ofsted report in 2013 concluded that PSHE was good or better in 60% of the schools inspected for the report. However, as the hon. Member for Rotherham said in her contribution, PSHE required improvement

or was inadequate in the other 40%. The report also found that sex and relationship education required improvement in over a third of schools.

I am committed to ensuring that our programme of reform is underpinned by evidence. That is why we are currently conducting a thorough engagement process on the scope and content of relationships education, relationships and sex education, and PSHE, involving a wide range of interested stakeholders. The Department is engaging with schools and teachers, parents and pupils, experts in safeguarding and child wellbeing—

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Nick Gibb:** I will not give way to the hon. Lady; I have literally one minute left.

The Department is also engaging with subject experts, voluntary organisations and other interested parties, including other Departments and public sector bodies. There are too many to list, but examples include the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Barnardo's, the PSHE Association, the Sex Education Forum, faith organisations, secular groups, Stonewall, the Terrence Higgins Trust, Young Enterprise, parent bodies, teaching unions, academics in this field and young people.

To ensure that we retain a focus on what is deliverable in schools, the Secretary of State has asked Ian Bauckham to advise on this piece of work. Ian is chief executive officer of the Tenax Schools Trust and executive headteacher of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School in Kent. He brings over 30 years of teaching experience, including 13 as a headteacher, to this piece of work. He is working with officials to ensure that we really understand how to support schools in delivering high-quality provision.

As the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead knows, to complement the engagement process, the Department is running a call for evidence, which closes on 12 February. It aims to gather views from as wide a range of bodies as possible. The responses so far to that call have been very encouraging, including from a large number of young people and parents. In the next steps, we will consider carefully those responses and other views collected through the engagement process, to determine sensitive and age-appropriate content, including

the future status of PSHE, which I know Members here are awaiting patiently. We are also aware that there is a huge interest in this matter in all parts of this House. To answer the question of the hon. Member for South Shields—she has been bursting to ask it again—the regulations and guidance will be subject to a full public consultation later this year.

The commitment we have made to making relationships education and RSE compulsory in all schools, and to considering the case for doing the same for PSHE, will further ensure that pupils' wellbeing continues to be supported in our schools. I hope that reassures hon. Members of the Government's commitment to this vital agenda for children and young people.

**Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair):** I call Teresa Pearce to respond.

10.58 am

**Teresa Pearce:** I thank everybody who has taken part today; this is a very important subject. I was a little concerned to hear the Minister talk about first aid in schools and only mention defibrillators. Defibrillators are very important, but first aid in school covers all sorts of things. A defibrillator will not help if somebody is having an epileptic attack. All sorts of first aid needs to be taught, not just defibrillation. The Minister also said that these things "can" be taught; I would have preferred him to say they "should" be taught.

I will finish with a quotation about the purpose of education:

"Education is the engine of our economy, it is the foundation of our culture, and it's an essential preparation for adult life. Delivering on our commitment to social justice requires us to place these 3 objectives at the heart of our education system."

That quote is from the Minister himself, in a speech he gave in 2015. I agree with him, and it is about time that we did that. We have all considered the importance of statutory PSHE and I look forward to seeing the results of the consultation.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the matter of statutory personal, health, social and economic education.

11 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## International Disaster Relief

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK's contribution to international disaster relief.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. It is quite timely to be debating this issue today on the back of data released last week by the OECD showing that the UK was one of only six countries to meet its commitment to spending 0.7% of its gross national income on international aid. Of the 29 members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, only Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Luxembourg regularly spend more than 0.7% of their national income on foreign aid. Although that is a rather depressing statistic in and of itself—given the ambition for developed countries to spend that amount was adopted by the UN General Assembly as far back as 1970 and was re-committed to at the 2005 G8 summit at Gleneagles and that, also in 2005, the 15 European Union members all agreed to reach the target by 2015—it is a figure that we as a nation should be incredibly proud of. We were the first of the G7 countries to meet the commitment.

However, in an era when tough decisions on spending have to be made in order to repair the economic damage done by the last Labour Government, and in the wake of the global financial crisis, I completely understand those who question why we continue to spend £12.1 billion on aid and development overseas and why we are not putting some of that money into, for example, schools, hospitals, roads or the Ministry of Defence.

**Leo Docherty** (Aldershot) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in terms of making the political argument for spending money on aid, it would perhaps be easier if we had a system in legislation whereby 0.7% was spent only when our economy was in surplus?

**Andrew Bowie**: I am receptive to that argument, but I do politely disagree with my hon. Friend. I will speak about that in more detail later.

I believe that we in this country have a duty to help struggling economies to build new partnerships, support fledgling democracies and help to put an end to disease, hunger and extreme poverty. I am convinced that our development budget is a crucial part of securing the United Kingdom's place in the world, helping to build a truly global Britain at this time.

It was Tony Blair, not somebody oft quoted in this place these days—although maybe more on our side than on the other side—who said, way back in 1999, that in today's interdependent world, our actions should be

“guided by a...subtle blend of mutual self-interest and moral purpose in defending the values that we cherish. In the end values and interests merge.”

I could not agree more. Our international aid budget is right not only on a humanitarian level, but in terms of our national interest. They are intertwined.

It is hard to believe that it was only five years ago, in 2013, that the World Health Organisation declared the Ebola epidemic in West Africa a public health emergency of international concern. That that status was lifted as quickly as March 2016 is due in no small part to the contribution of UK disaster relief and the actions of British, Irish and Canadian troops on the ground, as part of Operation Gritrock. In November 2013, just 13 months after the start of the operation, Sierra Leone was declared Ebola-free. Our military, especially our Navy—I would say that—deserve special mention when we talk about our contribution to disaster relief across the world.

In this place, we often speak of the bravery of our armed forces personnel in the face of adversity, but the sheer scale of the work that they do in our name, delivering disaster relief across the world, is truly astounding. During one of the worst stages of the European migrant crisis, for example, during April and July 2015, HMS Bulwark and 814 Naval Air Squadron rescued more than 2,900 migrants from drowning in the Mediterranean, as part of Operation Weald. Those 2,900 migrants faced certain death without our intervention. Looking to the future, HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales will transform the UK's maritime capability, including in terms of providing humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

**Leo Docherty**: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's generosity in giving way again. He mentions the importance of national interest in the way that we dispose of our aid. Does he agree that it is important that the expenditure of aid money comes under clear political leadership from the Foreign Office? I look forward to such a reassurance from the Minister. I would be interested to hear from the Minister whether there is any concern about the decoupling of directives about national interest and the expenditure of money through the Department for International Development, and if they are permitted to make political decisions in DFID when moneys are spent or allocated.

**Andrew Bowie**: I would suggest that that is a question for the Minister rather than me.

**Leo Docherty**: But does my hon. Friend agree?

**Andrew Bowie**: I do.

It is clear to me that without a strong Navy we could not have delivered the £92 million of aid that the UK contributed to the response following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, nor could we have deployed the 2,000 UK servicemen and women who spearheaded our aid relief. Without a strong Air Force, the RAF would not have been able to deliver aid to mountainous Nepal following the 2015 earthquakes there, when the Department for International Development provided shelter support for more than 214,000 people, as well as clean drinking water, sanitation and hygiene support for more than 56,000 people.

Although I do not support the approach that some of our European allies have taken in counting money spent for international aid purposes as defence spending, thereby making their declarations to NATO on defence spending questionable—to say the least—the huge role played by our armed forces in delivering our international humanitarian aid and disaster relief should make the

Ministry of Defence DFID's best friend and strongest ally. At the end of the day, we would all do well to remember that in chaos fear reigns and extremism and terrorism flourishes. Our aid budget and our contribution to disaster relief is, I believe, central to our safety and security and that of our allies overseas.

In his drive to increase US spending on combating AIDS in Africa, President George W. Bush—another one not often quoted in this place—said:

“When you have an entire generation of people being wiped out and the free world turns its back, it provides a convenient opportunity for people to spread extremism.”

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, and it is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. My hon. Friend mentioned George W. Bush. It is interesting to note that, on account of the focused effort that George W. Bush and his Administration put into relief in Africa, his reputation in Africa is second to none.

**Andrew Bowie:** I could not add anything more. My hon. Friend is absolutely right; George W. Bush's reputation there is almost in adverse relation to his reputation in this part of the world.

Concerns have been raised in this House and elsewhere about how our aid budget is focused on responding to disaster, rather than prioritising disaster preparedness so that countries are better equipped to help themselves. On that note, I return to the topic of Sierra Leone and the great work done there by DFID, in partnership with the armed forces.

One of the greatest achievements of the Royal Army Medical Corps 22 Field Hospital, who were deployed in Operation Gritrock, was to establish an Ebola training academy, which has trained more than 4,000 Sierra Leonean healthcare workers—a huge feat in a country with poor access to education and specialist training. Crucially, 22 Field Hospital implemented a “train the trainer” programme, ensuring local sustainability of the training in case of a fresh outbreak of the virus. The effect of that academy for the people of Sierra Leone cannot be overstated, not just on a practical level, but on a psychological one. It is a fantastic signal of this Government's direction of travel on aid spending.

We all know that, due to their nature and usual geographical location, when natural disasters strike it can take some time for even the best prepared aid effort to get itself under way, losing precious hours. Her Majesty's Government were criticised last September for what was perceived to be a slow response to Hurricane Irma, which caused terrible devastation to Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands, which are all, of course, British overseas territories. It is therefore right that UK aid organisations and DFID are working hard to shift the focus on disaster relief and aid from responding to pre-empting and building resilience in our programme countries, to help them to withstand the worst of natural disasters, including through the disasters and emergencies preparedness programme.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): There is a certain disparity in what my hon. Friend is saying in trying to contrast aid with disaster aid. Once the disaster aid is spent, a lot of our aid is spent on education, and that is one of the most useful things it can be spent on. Without that, we do not get the quality people in the country. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Andrew Bowie:** This is becoming a running theme—I could not agree more strongly.

It is sheer common sense that providing funding to countries at an elevated risk of natural disaster will reduce the need for British aid in the future and slow the pace at which it needs to be delivered to be effective. The people of the UK are rightly proud of this country's tradition of responding to disasters across the globe, and of the contribution that our armed forces make to those responses. I am immensely proud, as everyone here should be, that Britain is one of only six countries to contribute 0.7% of its gross national income to overseas aid and development. It gives me an immense feeling of pride to see the Union flag-branded aid parcels and to know that this country at least is doing what it can to ease the blights of poverty, poor education and low economic growth, and to create secure countries and develop partnerships that make us all more secure. It is a sign of who we are as a nation—outward-looking, positive and committed to meeting our responsibilities across the globe—that we deliver humanitarian aid and disaster relief across the globe when and where it is needed. We are working hard to pre-empt such disasters and make our response even more effective in the future. Those are the actions and the signs of a modern, compassionate and forward-thinking Government for a modern, compassionate and forward-thinking country.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Order. Five hon. Members have indicated they want to speak before the Front Benchers. We have got about 45 minutes before the Front Benchers, which is a reasonable amount of time. I do not want to set a time limit. That is just an indication of how long we have.

2.40 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) on securing this debate and on his excellent speech. I concur with what he said about the 0.7% commitment and about there being no conflict between our moral purpose and our national interest. All I would say is that it is vital that our work on international development is at all times guided by the centrality of reducing poverty and, in particular, adopting the sustainable development goals.

In 2016, the UK spent £1.2 billion on disaster relief. At roughly 15% of all overseas development assistance, that is the biggest single sector for UK aid. It was used to respond to natural disasters, disease—the hon. Gentleman gave the example of Ebola—terrorism, war and other conflicts, and mass atrocities. Our ability to react quickly to developing crises allows us to tackle serious issues before they develop. I want to draw attention to the emergency health unit, which is funded by DFID and run by Save the Children. In 2015, when there was an outbreak of measles in South Sudan, the emergency health unit was deployed quickly and provided life-saving vaccinations and medical assistance to the local population. In just three weeks, the UK's and Save the Children's direct action protected about 45,000 children from deadly disease.

[Stephen Twigg]

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Ebola crisis was a textbook example of effective UK action. Tragically, Ebola killed more than 11,000 people, yet that figure would have been a great deal higher but for the actions of the UK and others. The year before last, in the previous Parliament, the Select Committee on International Development concluded that DFID should be commended for the way it responded. In particular, we applauded all the staff who worked in Sierra Leone and the region to bring the epidemic under control. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the Ebola crisis is an excellent example of how DFID can work with other Departments, including the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health, and of how, by doing so, we can help those living in the affected communities and deliver value for money for the British taxpayer.

The International Development Committee has just begun an inquiry into the administration and definition of overseas development assistance. An increasing proportion of the UK's ODA is being spent by other Departments, and we want to look at that issue to ensure that the money is going towards the primary goal of poverty reduction. We also want to look at the definition of ODA. In the Conservative manifesto last year, there was a commitment to work with the OECD to change the definition of what constitutes ODA. It is sensible for the rules that govern ODA to be reviewed. The former Secretary of State called for more of the money that is spent on, for example, UN peacekeeping missions to count as overseas development assistance. As a result, the OECD doubled the proportion that can count from 7% to 15%, and I think that change made sense.

As it stands, the British overseas territories—the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine referred to Hurricane Irma—are not able to receive funds that count towards the 0.7% target, for the simple reason that their gross national income per head is far too high to qualify for aid spending.

**John Howell:** The hon. Gentleman may not be aware of this, but during a recent Council of Europe session I had words with the secretary-general of the OECD about redefining that definition so that it did not mean that, after the disasters that struck the Caribbean, we could not give money to those areas. Does he agree that we should still push for that?

**Stephen Twigg:** The International Development Committee is considering that matter, and we are still taking evidence on it. We have to tread with care, but there is a case to be made that, in some of the examples we have seen, such as in the Caribbean last year, there is a case for greater flexibility in the rules. In the evidence we have received for our inquiry, we have heard that the OECD has begun the process of examining a short-term financing mechanism, which could be made available to countries that have previously been on the recipient list for ODA but no longer are, by virtue of their current income. That would be allowed only in exceptional circumstances, but the Hurricane Irma situation could be such an exceptional circumstance.

The Development Assistance Committee at the OECD has also agreed to create a new mechanism to allow countries to go back more quickly on the list of ODA-eligible countries if their income per capita has fallen

enough as a direct consequence of a natural disaster. That reform to the rules, which is quite narrowly defined, might well meet the sorts of circumstances that the hon. Gentleman describes.

My note of caution is this: it is vital that our overseas development assistance goes to those who need it most—to the poorest parts of the world. In the overseas territories, one extreme—the Cayman Islands—has a gross national income per head 86 times larger than that of Ethiopia, and even the poorest of the Caribbean overseas territories, Anguilla, has a per-capita income 20 times higher than that of Ethiopia. In the light of that, I urge the Minister to take great care as the Government proceed with the discussions with the OECD DAC. I would not rule out some of the changes I have referred to, which I know the Government are discussing with the OECD.

When a crisis strikes, it is important that basic services such as health and education continue as normally as possible. I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman's point about education. Education Cannot Wait, which was set up with DFID's help, is an incredibly important programme to support children living in emergency situations. It currently works with more than 3 million in 13 countries, many of whom are refugees or internally displaced people as a direct consequence of natural disasters, war or other atrocities.

Immediate and life-saving assistance is vital when crises occur, but it is important to lay the groundwork for a sustainable future as quickly as possible. The evidence that our Committee has taken over a number of years shows that the Department's use of cash transfers can be a useful, productive and efficient way of giving support to people in some of the most vulnerable situations. Cash transfers typically have a much lower administrative cost, and give beneficiaries much more control over their own need. What scope do the Minister and the Department see for a wider use of cash transfers when disasters hit?

The central issue is climate change, which is an increasingly significant cause of humanitarian crises. In the past two decades alone, more than 1 million people have died as a consequence of weather extremes and their associated disasters. The Government's report on building resilience and adaptation to climate change estimates that by 2030 there could be more than 300 million people trapped in poverty because of climate change. Surely it is vital that preventive measures are funded and pursued. As climate change continues to be an enormous challenge, countries will have to learn to adapt to changing conditions to prevent disasters. DFID already spends nearly £150 million a year on prevention programmes, including in South Sudan, Afghanistan and Burma, which help to build resilience to the changing environment and ensure that, when disaster strikes, locals have access to timely, appropriate and cost-effective humanitarian aid.

In conclusion, the UK has long played a positive role in disaster relief. Our Committee's inquiry is examining in detail the Government's case for changing the ODA rules, and we will report on that later this year. Clearly, climate change, natural disasters, conflict and mass atrocities mean that an increasing number of people are displaced as refugees or internally. Effective relief is vital, but ultimately we need to do more to address the causes of displacement so that, where possible, we prevent such disasters from happening in the first place.

2.50 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): It is a great pleasure and privilege to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who gave a first-class speech, and my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), whom I congratulate on securing the debate. It is always timely to debate this subject. As we came through the doors into Westminster Hall, someone mentioned it was good to come to discuss good things, and this is a good subject to talk about, not because we are doing everything that can possibly be done, but because it is an opportunity for us to assess what is being done and what more can be done.

I think it is fair to say that, thanks to this country and the generosity of its people, many people around the world are helped when they suffer from natural and man-made disasters. At a time of so many needs, some of which we have heard discussed in great detail and with expert commentary, more people than ever before are on the move across the world. In many ways, the world is in commotion, and I think we are at the height of mass movement of people since the end of the second world war, and at a time of increasing population as well.

In my short contribution I will not try to match the wonderful speeches given earlier, but I will reflect on the generosity of the British people themselves and on how they respond to the disasters that we all too frequently witness. We all know the Government figures—some have been quoted—the legislative requirement to spend on humanitarian relief and the effect of military deployments in disaster zones. We should all be proud of the men and women who wear the uniform of our armed forces, in particular in the context of administering humanitarian relief. We are also all aware of what UK aid is achieving, providing food, shelter and medicine whenever and wherever a disaster presents itself.

The truly impressive thing, however, is that when asked the British people themselves are also keen to put their hand in their collective pocket. A cursory adding up of figures on the Disasters Emergency Committee website shows that it raised some £97 million in the past year for ongoing DEC appeals. The contribution of this country goes beyond finance, to people, who selflessly go or are deployed to the parts of the world where their services are most needed. That includes medical people, construction people, rescue teams from the emergency services, who are volunteers, and missionaries, volunteers and aid workers from a raft of different organisations, all putting themselves in harm's way to care for people affected by disasters.

This debate is about the UK contribution to disaster relief, but Government action, although welcome, is not the only thing that the UK does, so we should be proud of—actually, we should be humble about—our history of philanthropy, humanitarianism and action in such areas. In my constituency, we have a citizenship award named after William “Citizen” Jaffray, who understood that more than most. He personified the values of philanthropy—I must make a note not to use that word too often, because it is one I always struggle with. In the early part of the 19th century he paid for smallpox inoculation of the population throughout Stirlingshire, saving thousands of lives. That is one example of private charity, and he put his money into it as millions of

people in the UK do today—but he invested in preparing people to stop an epidemic before it happened. That is my theme in the remaining part of my speech.

I am sure Members are aware of the work of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation in this field. FAO work is focused clearly on governance, information systems, spreading good practice and capacity development—that is the disaster early intervention agenda. By improving our information systems and our understanding of how and when disasters will happen, we can stop them happening in the first place—we hope. Data and information are key: for example, understanding of a river network will allow environmental interventions that can reduce the likelihood of flooding. By having detailed mapping information on settlements, we can understand where and when there are likely to be disease outbreaks. Work such as that undertaken by the Food and Agriculture Organisation to map the rivers of south-east Asia, or that of Missing Maps around the world to ensure that the humanitarian open street map is fit for the next disaster, is vital to all of that.

I understand that not all disasters can be predicted or mitigated, but many can be. It is worthwhile noting that around the world, according to the UN, 62p in every £100 spent on disaster aid was spent on preparedness; but we in the UK lag behind, investing only 42p in every £100. Yet an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The disaster early intervention agenda is about good governance, the rule of law, mapping, understanding of the natural environment, and community resilience. Those are actually strengths of the United Kingdom, so we can and must do better in that field, harnessing our great national talents and resources to make a difference around the world. If we do so, we will save people before they need to be saved.

2.56 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. These days, it is something of a rare pleasure for me to take part in a Westminster Hall debate, but I received special dispensation from the Scottish National party Whips Office to do so today. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) on securing this debate. I was our party's international development spokesperson in the previous Parliament, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute. Earlier this morning, by happy coincidence, I was meeting representatives of Scotland's International Development Alliance. All in, it has been a bit of a time warp.

The debate is timely, as other Members have said, including the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr). The need for disaster response has, sadly, never been greater. In particular, in recent years the displacement of people by hunger, conflict and climate change has put the whole international development and disaster relief system to the test.

Aid can of course be shorthand for many different things, in particular in the context of disaster relief—relief, rebuilding, resilience, root causes and our responsibilities. Relief in the immediate aftermath, again as others have said, is vital, especially in the face of a natural disaster or something unseen such as the tsunamis of recent years and, to a lesser extent, the Ebola outbreak. Like other Members, I pay tribute to the work of the DEC

[Patrick Grady]

and the recently established DEC in Scotland. They bring together the best of the agencies and the best of the skills and experience to avoid duplication and to ensure maximisation of the funds donated by the public. The UK Government can do the same thing through the UN agencies.

The Chair of the International Development Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), made a point about cash transfers, which are important in all such situations but particularly in immediate disaster relief. He outlined the reasons for cash transfers, which include the ability of affected individuals to spend the money to meet their own needs, and the impact that that then has in revitalising the local economy and in terms of the very basic human dignity in doing that. Rather than us as paternalistic donors deciding what is good for people, we give them the power, recognising that, even in the midst of calamity, they have the option to decide and choose for themselves.

Moving on to the rebuilding phase, that is a particular challenge. I only vaguely remember the statistic, but at one time someone might be a refugee or displaced person for three or four years; now, for a displaced person on the Syrian border, for example, or someone displaced by famine in one of the central African countries, it can be for up to 18 years—an entire generation. Therefore, rebuilding, reconstruction and investment, in particular in education—again as we have heard—are vital.

On the reaction to Hurricane Irma—the effect on UK overseas territories and their GDP, and rebuilding—it is not that we should not give them money. They are dependencies of the United Kingdom, and we would give money if—God forbid—something happened here in the United Kingdom. We have responded to tragedies that have happened on our own doorstep, but we do not try to count that as official development assistance or aid, because that is part of our global network and definition. As the Chair of the International Development Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, and other speakers said, if there are to be changes to those definitions, they have to be agreed through a multilateral process. There has to be consensus among the donor countries and the change has to be driven by overriding humanitarian principles, in particular the sustainable development goals. I might come back to say something about that in a bit more detail if time allows.

One of the challenges is getting the resilience in the first place: making sure that communities that are at risk from conflict, famine or climate change have a degree of resilience so that these issues can be nipped in the bud. DFID has the challenge of delivering the remainder of the aid budget and trying to keep it as significant as it can be in supporting local grassroots communities—for example, sustainable agricultural developments, so that farmers are not suddenly hit by a lack of artificial fertilisers but are in a position where they can grow sustainable crops even in the midst of climate change, drought or floods.

The root causes have to be tackled. Why are people caught up in disasters? Usually it is because there is a root cause somewhere. It has been said that climate change is the biggest challenge—it threatens to roll

back progress that had been made toward the millennium development goals, and potentially towards the sustainable development goals. Conflict situations are a challenge, too. Although it may not be directly applicable to this debate, research by the Scottish National party has shown that 13 times as much was spent on bombing Libya than was spent on the rebuilding effort. Sadly, those statistics can be found elsewhere, too.

We have to take a little responsibility for why some of the very often preventable disaster situations arise. It is important that the spending is there to meet needs when they arise, but it should not have to be at the expense of investment in tackling root causes and the resilience stage of the aid process. That is why I welcome the cross-party consensus on the 0.7% target, but there are questions to be asked about exactly how that figure is defined and spent.

One of my repeated concerns, which touches on the point about UN peacekeeping, is about the way that the Government continue to double-count money that is spent towards both the 0.7% target and the 2% NATO target. To some extent, that may be permitted under some readings of OECD rules, but there is a danger of conflation of the two, and that both arms of expenditure will lose out. I have my own views on military expenditure, starting with Trident, but no matter what one's views on those things are, as far as possible, efforts should be made to keep those budgets separate, or at least properly and transparently accounted for, so that, whether in Committee, Westminster Hall or elsewhere, we can scrutinise them.

That speaks a little more widely to the mission creep of other Departments and the claims that they are starting to put on the 0.7% budget. It should not be a cover because the Foreign and Commonwealth Office struggles to meet some of its other requirements for aspects of diplomatic missions. The FCO should be resourced; the Department for International Development should be resourced; the Ministry of Defence should be resourced. It is perfectly possible to find ways of doing that if we look at some of the big, unnecessary capital expenditure, not least Trident—the Tories can tick off their bingo box. If the other Departments are to spend a greater share of the 0.7%, they have to be held to the same standards of transparency and the same levels of scrutiny as DFID has been over the years.

I conclude with a thought on the idea of aid money serving the national interest. In my previous guise I used to repeatedly ask Ministers for a definition of the national interest, because I do not see how it can be anything other than the meeting and delivery of the sustainable development goals. How is the United Kingdom's national interest not served by building a more peaceful and sustainable world, where people are less susceptible to shocks of conflict, climate change and famine, where girls are educated, people have access to safe running water and the environment is protected? That is the national interest. If there is some other national interest that has been hinted at when Members says, "This is what aid should be," I would be interested to know what that is. That would be useful to hear.

It is encouraging that there is usually a cross-party consensus on this kind of issue; we have managed to hear praise for both Tony Blair and George W. Bush in the debate so far. At the very least, that is an indication of our intention to come together to act not just in our

enlightened self-interest, but in the best interest of people who very often find themselves in situations that are no fault of their own in developing parts of the world.

3.6 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) on setting the scene so well, as he always does in debates in Westminster Hall. Debates here often are used to raise issues that are important to us, which is what the hon. Gentleman has done. Other hon. Members and I are here because we share his interest and concerns.

I have been outspoken on the obligation of those who have much to those who have little. We have a duty to help and to show compassion for those in need. However, having been brought up as an Ulster Scot with some Brethren ties, let me assure hon. Members that we are called to be good stewards of our money. We need to ensure that what we send gets to where it should get to and that it helps those who we want to help. There has to be some monitoring and regulation to make sure that it happens. For that reason, although I support overseas aid, I am concerned about how it is used. It is easy to dismiss the many newspaper and media reports, but they raise some concerns about where the moneys are spent.

I am always pleased to see the Minister in his place, because we all know him to have compassion and a real deep interest in his subject matter. There will be no one in the House or outside it, I suspect, who would do anything other than support him in his work. I asked the former Secretary of State for International Development what recent estimate had made of the proportion of the Palestinian Authority's foreign aid receipts spent on payments to convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons in the last 12 months. The response I received was excellent, and I thank the Minister for it. It stated:

"In August 2017, the International Monetary Fund estimated that external financial support to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 2017 will total \$666 million USD (approx. £500 million GBP). Many donors, including the UK and European Union, restrict their support to the PA for specific purposes and projects, and ensure that none of their aid is used for payments to convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons. No estimates have been made of the proportion of the PA's external financial support which was spent on payments to convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons in the last 12 months."

It continued:

"No UK aid is used for payments to Palestinian prisoners or their families. UK financial assistance to the PA is only used to help to pay the salaries of health and education public servants in the West Bank. Only named public servants from a pre-approved EU list are eligible and a robust verification system validates that funds are used for the intended purposes. The UK government strongly condemns all forms of violence including incitement to violence."

That reply was exactly what I wanted. It sets the scene and puts to rest some of my concerns, and outlines where we are. I welcome that good, comprehensive response.

It is essential that we know where the relief is going, who has their hands on it and who the beneficiaries of the relief are. I always give examples from Northern Ireland and my own constituency because I want everybody inside and outside this House to know about Strangford. I recently hosted a fund-raising dinner for my branch of

the Democratic Unionist party. We have a dinner every year and have done so for the past five years. The dinner has a dual purpose. The event is in a local church that provides a fantastic four-course meal for those who purchase tickets. It is in a lovely area and the proceeds raised from the price of a meal go to a charity in Swaziland, the Eden Mission. It does great work: it digs wells and provides schooling and health services. The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) is nodding his head. Like me, he understands that we have a close connection with what is happening.

I have hosted the dinner for the past five years and will continue to do so. I trust what the mission does and it promises to make a difference in Swaziland. I have seen the children's choir that the mission brought to Northern Ireland. They have sung in my office and in the halls of Stormont, where the Northern Ireland Assembly functioned until a short time ago. We hope it will function again, but we must wait and see. I know that the choice I made to host my dinner in a church hall as opposed to a local restaurant that would charge roughly the same was a good decision to make. Just over £1,000 was raised for the charity. The church did the catering and we had some auctions.

My desire is to make sure that we make good decisions about how our aid is spent and who the real beneficiaries are. The project that I support sends containers out every year to Africa. The project workers tell me stories about what happens. They pack the container to within an inch of its life. Every conceivable portion of space is used. Sweets and clothes are packed into every crevice of the container. They also tell me that they have learnt the lesson of packing because they found that when they packed expensive items, such as wheelchairs and schooling aids, to the front, those would go missing during customs searches. That is a fact. It happened. It is unfortunate it happened, but it did. They have learnt to pack the expensive items in the middle of the container to make it harder to take them.

When I was told that story I wondered how much of our aid—I pose this as a question—has been siphoned off and whether we are doing all we can to protect our aid and to pack it in the middle, as it were, as my church, an Eden Church, has done in the past. This is why I asked the Secretary of State for International Development what monitoring the Department undertakes to ensure that aid granted to specific areas is used for the purposes for which it was intended; and whether it will liaise with religious missionaries in the destination country to ensure that UK aid is effectively distributed. The reply was excellent.

I do not question that the effective use of the UK aid budget is central to the Department for International Development's work. I understand that all funding is subject to rigorous due diligence checks and that we have strict auditing and monitoring controls in place to ensure that all funding is used as it should be, and that every project is subject to an annual performance review and a project completion review to ensure that the objectives have been achieved and aid has been delivered to the intended beneficiaries. I am pleased that the Department uses multiple sources of information, including its partnerships with civil society, to be confident that UK aid reaches those intended. However, I would push for greater interaction with those on the ground who are able to distribute the aid.

[Jim Shannon]

I again ask the Minister whether he will outline what work is done with NGOs to see that aid reaches the mouths of the babies with bellies swollen from malnutrition, and not the custom official with a swollen belly from too much food. It may be a little harsh to say that, but it is a fact. I have seen photographs—we have all seen them—of bellies swollen because of malnutrition and a big guy across the way whose idea of a balanced meal is probably two hamburgers in each hand. He seems to indulge in food when others are starving. I feel genuinely aggrieved by that. When we see the starving children, any person with any compassion whatever would be well aware of that. Having heard at first hand the struggles that children in Africa and other areas go through to survive, and understanding that there is a limited amount that this country can afford to give, every penny must be made to count. That is why I urge the Government again to ensure that it counts on the ground and not simply on a checklist on a desk.

Should we give aid internationally, despite the pressure we face at home? Yes, we should, and I fully endorse the Minister's and the Government's stand. Indeed, they have cross-party support. Should we account for every penny, every blanket, every grain of rice? We must, because it is our job to be good stewards. Should we make use of on-the-ground agencies and bodies? That is wisdom and good stewardship. I thank DFID and the Minister for the leadership and stewardship that he gives to the Department. That is why we have trust in him and support him. I want to make sure we are doing all that is possible to get it right.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** I want to start the wind-ups at 27 minutes past 3.

3.15 pm

**Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab):** As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) on securing this excellent debate. We have a great deal of consensus in this debating Chamber, and it is important for the Minister to know that, although we can always argue about the refinement of processes, there is nevertheless an overwhelming view that the commitment to 0.7% of GDP as a national objective is one that is shared. In any case, the overriding national consensus supports what all Governments have done in this area.

However, I want to strike a marginal, discordant note. I do not think we have to begin by talking about the national interest. There is a profoundly moral case around disaster relief. I have sat with refugees in Macedonia and Albania who were fleeing the conflict in Kosovo. In Lebanon, I have seen people fleeing over the border from Syria. Most recently, in Bangladesh, we have seen refugees from Myanmar. I cannot look them in the eyes and believe that this issue is only about national interest, because it is not. The British people, generally speaking, are much bigger than that. It is important to make the moral case.

There is also a pragmatic case. At the time of the conflict in Kosovo, we saw refugees flooding into this country. I have constituents who came into this country

as refugees from Kosovo—ditto Syria and so on. We know that whenever disaster arises around the world, it has repercussions. There is a profound case—hon. Members have mentioned this—for arguing that the real precursor to disaster relief is having long-term sustainability, to prevent disasters in the first place. That is not always possible. Some of the things that we anticipate are easy, but the unknown unknowns are problematic. Climate change is still producing unknown impacts, particularly in Africa. With the growing population and the capacity for climate change to disrupt whole communities, we might see disaster. That will almost certainly produce a tide of refugees who will look north to Europe for support and shelter.

Some hon. Members mentioned Ebola. We must be alive to the fact that there could be some as yet unknown pandemic that will hit this world of ours. It will be a global problem; it will not be about national interest. It will be about us working collectively together, as we did in the case of Ebola, but possibly on diseases as yet unknown that could have massively more dramatic consequences. And, of course, sadly, war on this planet is still something that we do not entirely control.

When a disaster takes place, the British are massively good-hearted. Some Members have already commented on that—the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) made that very point. We have a good-hearted nation. We see money going to charities, as well as action from our Government.

In the most recent case, of the Rohingya in Bangladesh, the British Government behaved admirably with respect to disaster relief. It was important, however, that that was co-ordinated by the Bangladeshi authorities, and particularly the Bangladeshi army, which was important in making sure that the camps were stable. There was of course also a plethora of agencies from all over the world. When I was in Bangladesh—I should point out my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, having travelled there recently—I met people from the Canadian Red Cross and aid agencies from around the world. All that immediate action requires some degree of co-ordination.

Immediate disasters are not simple to deal with—they are massively complicated—but because such action has been needed on a number of occasions over the years, there are now structures that can quite quickly get operations moving. Sometimes the challenge is what happens post-disaster. I know from exchanges on the Floor of the House that the Minister has thought about what happens next for the Rohingya in Bangladesh. It is not so much a question of transferring people back; that is a considerable way off. It is more about the fact that up to 50,000 women will give birth in the coming months and there is still not a clean water supply or sanitation system to sustain a population that may be living on a small patch of land for a considerable time to come.

The problem, of course, is that the world begins to move on. We saw that, to an extent, at the global level. Britain was a major contributor to the global efforts to provide assistance to the Rohingya in Bangladesh, but those funds are still undersubscribed. This is not about us being morally superior, but it sometimes helps to say we have played a significant part.

We do need people to stay for the long term. If we do not stabilise them into the long term, populations on the scale of the Rohingya in Bangladesh can be a

hotbed of disaster. That can mean disaster for the population itself—through criminality, child prostitution and all the evils that can take place in such a community—but there is also the capacity for radicalisation, as has happened in other parts of the world. We must deal with disasters in the long term, not just the first weeks and months.

Several hon. Members mentioned Syria. If it gets to a post-conflict situation, the reconstruction of what was once, if not a first-world country, then certainly not a disaster case, will take decades—perhaps two generations. I think it was the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) who made the point about the relative amounts spent on conflict and on post-conflict stabilisation. That applies to Iraq, Afghanistan and many different parts of the world. Even our country has not put as much into the post-conflict situations as into the creation of the conflicts.

A number of Members pointed out the need to develop local partnerships. The capacity to work with local partner agencies is fundamental for both immediate disaster relief and the second phase. Often, large international agencies, however well intentioned they are, do not have the sophistication to get down to almost street level, which makes a material difference to people on the ground. There are problems with that approach, because as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, we have a duty to steward the pound that we spend. That is right and proper, but it is also important that such stewardship does not mean we miss the trick of getting the resources where they can do people maximum good. That often means working with local partner agencies.

Disasters will occur again and again around the world. It is of course right and proper to reserve resources for disaster relief, including for stabilisation after the immediate disaster period. Nepal, for example, is still not back together after the disaster of some years ago. In the longer run, we should not pit disaster relief against investment in long-term infrastructure, because investment in education, agriculture or industry will make a material difference in stabilising the parts of the world in question. It will make them less prone to war and more resilient to climate change, and it will make them better partners, even if that is seen in terms of narrow national interest. In any case, to conclude as I began, there is a moral debate to be had in the end: we share this planet, and our fellow global citizens deserve something from us. We are good at this and should not be ashamed of what we do.

3.25 pm

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) for his excellent speech, and I thank hon. Members for all the others that have been made in the debate. There is clearly a lot of consensus about the significance of the UK's contribution to international disaster relief.

This is an important and timely debate. The world is facing the largest humanitarian crisis since 1945, with 20 million people at risk of starvation as a result of drought and conflict in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Nigeria alone, according to the UN. The UK public have been among the most generous responders to

emergency appeals, and they largely support action by the UK Government to respond to such disasters. However, an improved response is and will be needed to cope better with current and future humanitarian crises.

I welcome UK bilateral spending on humanitarian aid, which has steadily increased over the past seven years, and the vast majority of which has been spent on emergency response. That can only be a good thing. However, research shows that investing in disaster risk reduction prior to disasters saves life and is far more cost-effective than funding the response after a disaster has happened. It is too simplistic to assume an overarching cost-benefit ratio, but a study by the World Bank estimates that every pound spent on preparedness saves in the region of £7 in repair and recovery costs. Despite that, as has been mentioned, just 0.4% of global aid is spent on preparing for disasters. The world humanitarian summit in 2016 agreed to increase humanitarian aid spending on disaster risk reduction from 0.4% to 5%. DFID signed up to that, and I ask the Minister to provide an update on what progress has been made towards that goal. I also urge the UK Government to continue to invest in the disasters and emergencies preparedness programme beyond this year, when it is scheduled to end.

It is important to note that 90% of recorded major disasters caused by natural hazards from 1995 to 2015 were linked to weather and climate change. Fragile states have been hit hardest, and have the fewest resources to cope with climate change impacts. Even the global strategic trends programme of the Ministry of Defence acknowledges that humanitarian assistance will increase by up to 1,600% in the next 20 years, and says that that is

“in large part due to the effects of climate change”.

The current draft of the sustainable development goals highlights the fact that to achieve goal No. 1, which is to

“End poverty in all its forms everywhere”,

society needs to

“build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental disasters”.

The Government should follow the world-leading work of the Scottish Government by setting up a climate justice fund to support vulnerable countries in mitigating and adapting to the changing circumstances caused by climate change events. It would make much more sense, rather than dipping into the aid budget after such events, to acknowledge the risks and take action to reduce them before disaster strikes. There is a critical opportunity to do that now, while the political will exists, and I ask the Minister to look at that as soon as he can.

To give an example from last year, Hurricane Irma was not adequately prepared for and there was a lack of forward thinking and a slow response from the UK Government, despite indications that the hurricane would wreak devastation. Every year hurricanes cause on average \$835 million of damage in the Caribbean and almost \$200 million of damage in the Pacific, so the UK Government should have seen it coming. The climate challenge must therefore be integrated into national development plans and strategies. Coping with climate variability and attempting to anticipate future climate changes are no longer an optional extra but should be a policy imperative for the Government.

[Chris Law]

As well as investing in disaster risk reduction to make aid more effective, it is important to channel more funds as directly as possible through local and national actors on the ground in the affected area—we have heard a bit about that this afternoon. Such organisations know their local communities well and can respond to humanitarian crises in a quick and effective manner.

At the world humanitarian summit 2016, the biggest donors, including DFID, came together to recognise and agree the Grand Bargain. That was a series of changes to the way that donors and aid organisations work, and it aimed to get means into the hands of those in most need. Last September the UK Government recommitted to the full implementation of the Grand Bargain, but the UK response to the Rohingya crisis shows that there is a long way to go to meet those objectives. There is a lack of transparency regarding how much funding local organisations receive from the UK, and mechanisms for empowering the Rohingya with access to decision making and planning in the crisis remain limited, meaning that the response is less effective than it could be.

Only 0.2% of humanitarian funding is currently channelled to local and national actors—I think everybody in the room would say that that is woefully inadequate. NGOs support an increase to 25%, and the UK Government should also commit further funding to the Start Fund, which provides grants to small organisations in emergency situations.

Let us consider the changing focus of international aid. The UK is seen, without doubt, as a leader in shaping the global development agenda. Although aid effectiveness is difficult to measure, recent reports from the International Development Committee point out that foreign aid is—quite rightly—the most scrutinised part of UK Government spending. It is monitored by the Committee, the National Audit Office and the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, and it scores highly on the international aid transparency index. However, there has recently been an alarming shift in the strategic focus of the UK aid strategy, and growing importance is now attached to the promotion of the UK's so-called national interest. A key mechanism for achieving that, as set out in the 2015 aid strategy, has been to direct the aid budget away from DFID to other Departments, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence.

Official figures show that, last year, roughly a quarter of the UK's aid budget was spent by Government Ministries other than DFID—a rise of almost 50%. The direction of travel has raised serious concerns that that will reduce focus on global poverty alleviation, as well as concerns about the transparency and accountability of aid spending outside DFID. DFID has a commitment, enshrined in UK law, to reducing poverty, but it is not at all clear that other Departments have that same commitment. Will the Minister outline what steps DFID is taking to ensure that other Departments improve transparency and accountability in their ODA spending, and say how that will be measured? A recent report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies emphasised that position, and warned that the trend towards funnelling less aid money through DFID, combined with a growing emphasis on ensuring benefit to British firms, would have a negative impact on poverty reduction in developing countries.

After an OECD meeting in November, the Government reported that reforms to the ODA rules had been agreed. Those included doubling the percentage of contributions to UN peacekeeping missions that count as aid—such as the UK troops sent to South Sudan—from 7% to 15%. That followed agreements last year that made more security and counter-extremism spending eligible. It is our view that the foreign aid budget should never be used for defence, and this change appears to be a clear attempt to dilute the fight against poverty. We are extremely concerned about such developments driven by the UK Government.

The Secretary of State recently pledged in a *Telegraph* article to use Britain's foreign aid as part of “a bold new Brexit-ready proposition to boost trade and investment with developing countries”.

It is concerning to read that UK aid could be used to mitigate the negative impacts of Brexit, with the UK's security and prosperity key factors in deciding how aid is spent. The reiteration that aid must be spent in the national interest was typically disappointing. I cannot emphasise enough that the delivery of aid must remain focused on ending extreme poverty and supporting a fairer, more sustainable future.

3.33 pm

*Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.*

3.59 pm

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

*On resuming—*

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** The sitting is resumed, and I believe the SNP spokesman has three minutes to go.

**Chris Law:** Thank you, Mr Hollobone. I must say that it is also a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, since I see the Chair has changed in the past few minutes.

I was coming to my conclusion, but I will reiterate the point I was making about the notion of the national interest, which is that it does not mean very much. I have to reflect on what the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) called the moral interest, because it is in all of our interests to serve the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable internationally.

I cannot emphasise enough that the delivery of aid must remain focused on ending extreme poverty and supporting a fairer, more sustainable future for all. Although that sounds obvious, it needs to be reiterated time and again. It is in all of our interests. It is a promise we made to the world's poorest and most vulnerable, and that is what the UK taxpayer has the right to expect.

It is also critical to ensure that all our aid is high-impact, transparent and accountable and that it delivers real change for people living in poverty, no matter which Department it comes from. That is why I urge the Minister to commit to investing more funding to resilience and recovery for those living in the fragile nations most at risk of climate-related extreme events and economic and social disasters. Lastly, I urge him to channel more funding as directly as possible through local and national actors on the ground in the affected area, working with local communities and organisations.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Because of the votes, the timings of this debate have changed. The debate now finishes no later than 4.26 pm.

4 pm

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

This is my first effort responding as a member of Labour's Front Bench, and I am delighted to do so. It is perhaps a slight shame that today, of all days, it has been an all-male debate, but I am sure that the Minister and I can both say that our Departments are finely led by female colleagues. It gives me great pleasure to follow in the footsteps of distinguished colleagues, and even more to have managed to be here on time, which hopefully forestalls any demands for me to follow in the footsteps of Lord Bates—although I am glad to say that he has not been asked to resign as Minister of State for being 60 seconds or so late to the Dispatch Box. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods), who served admirably in the shadow role in DFID.

I am rapidly learning that perspective is important in politics, as is the ability to recognise when Government Departments are doing a good job, even if their Ministers are sometimes late. I am pleased to commend DFID on the hugely important work it does—work that is recognised and appreciated by the United Nations, among others. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) on securing this important debate, and pay tribute to all hon. Members who have taken part. There have been some fine contributions, not least on my own side, from the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), and from my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd).

When it comes to international disaster relief, the UK continues to set an enviable example, although of course we could always do more. The Organisation for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs commends Britain on the commitments it made following the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. In common with us, OCHA would like to know whether the UK Government will continue to report to the platform for action, commitments and transformation on how it is meeting those commitments.

The sheer scale of the global humanitarian crisis risks making us all feel like powerless bystanders. In recent weeks, upward of one quarter of a million people have fled their homes in north-west Syria, the largest single exodus in a savage civil war that has lasted seven years—taking place, by the way, at a time when we are being told that the Syrian civil war is coming nearer to its end. This year's United Nations response plan for Yemen describes the war-torn country as

“the worst man-made humanitarian crisis”

in the world, with more than 22 million people—around three quarters of the total population—in need of help.

Since the escalation of violence in March 2015, when conflict broke out, Yemen, already the poorest country in the region, has been left on the verge of a humanitarian collapse. We know that in both Syria and Yemen, conflict has been intensely aggravated by the fact that those countries are being used as proxies by others to further other agendas. We know, too, that because of that the demands placed on those charged with delivering disaster

relief have been unrelenting. It is important to name and praise all those who struggle daily with the tide of human misery caused by these wars with no end.

I will mention one unsung hero, who in so many ways personifies what is best about the often-maligned United Nations and its agencies. Over the past few years, it has been the voice of the UN humanitarian co-ordinator, Jamie McGoldrick, that has drawn the world's attention most loudly and most often to Yemen's plight. He felt that he had to, as journalists had been banned from the country. He has just stepped down, having overseen one of the most difficult and challenging aid operations in the world. When asked how it felt to deliver aid to an increasingly desperate population in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick said that there is

“no point in getting angry, there's no point in getting frustrated, the point is to get smart.”

It is high time that we in this place got smart. We owe it to people like Jamie McGoldrick and to the tens of thousands that he and his colleagues struggle to care for. Being smart means that we simply cannot tolerate a situation where the British Government sanction arms sales to Saudi Arabia, whose aerial bombardment of Yemen has caused so much death and destruction, while salving our collective conscience by asking people like Jamie McGoldrick to ensure that, if possible, traumatised women and children are pulled out of the rubble. The situation is simply not acceptable, nor is it sustainable.

In response to the points raised by the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, I will say that the UK Navy has played an important role in international disaster relief, for example in the Caribbean hurricanes and the UK's response to the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone. Our defence forces can and should contribute to humanitarian relief, but I want to exercise a note of caution. Whenever we spend our aid budget, it must be about getting the biggest bang for our buck for the world's poorest. The priority must always be poverty reduction and humanitarian relief, in line with internationally agreed rules. Where the armed forces can offer real added value and where they are explicitly doing humanitarian work, then it is an option worth exploring further.

We also need to get smart by standing up to those we believe we have a special relationship with, especially when they slash funding to organisations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the main relief lifeline for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Their displacement from their homeland has continued, in some cases, for over half a century. If we are to use our influence to ensure that funding mechanisms are found for the longer term and for development financing for refugee countries, why are we leaving it to other countries to fill the funding gap left by the Trump Administration?

Returning to the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016, I would ask the Minister what progress his Department is making to ensure that at least 25% of humanitarian funding is delivered as directly as possible to local and national actors by 2020. I also ask whether the UK is increasing the proportion of aid spent on disaster risk reduction from 0.4% to 0.5% on the timelines laid out.

Today, the world is facing the largest humanitarian crisis since 1945, with 20 million people at risk of starvation as a result of drought and conflict in South

[Dan Carden]

Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Nigeria alone. The scale of suffering is almost unimaginable and the task of reversing this tide of human misery so enormous that the temptation to simply slink away and pretend nothing is happening is too much. We can begin by at least recognising where we are getting it right and by turning our attention to what more we can do as one of the richest nations on earth.

We can also start by comprehending that a second world war that left millions dead and even more without shelter gave rise not only to the United Nations, but to a generation of people prepared to put their collective shoulder to the wheel to ensure that such conflict never happened again. With far fewer resources, and in a Europe and Asia whose cities had been flattened, that generation not only rebuilt, but strove for a better society—one without conflict. We still have much more to do to put an end to the conflict that is fuelling so much human misery today.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** After that glittering debut, I will ask the Minister to conclude his remarks no later than 4.23 pm, to allow Mr Bowie three minutes to sum up at the end.

4.9 pm

**The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) for calling the debate, and all colleagues who have taken part.

To my knowledge, this is the first time I have faced an Opposition spokesman born not only after I first became a Member of Parliament but after I first joined the payroll as the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Ken Baker, which was a year before the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) was born. I will think of a suitable response in due course, but I put that on the record. It is a pleasure to welcome him to his place. I am sure he will give distinguished service on his party's Front Bench for some time to come. We appreciate what he has to say and I am pleased he has such an obvious interest in this subject.

The UK has a leading reputation in humanitarian response, as colleagues have recognised, and the Prime Minister, the International Development Secretary and other senior Ministers attach great importance to that. The national interest is very wide and it encapsulates what the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) and others spoke of. It is not narrow or narrowly focused and need not be considered that way. It encompasses the values behind international development, to which all parties in the House subscribe. It is important that, when we talk about it, we make clear to those who support development that it goes very wide. The projection of values is important for a state, a nation and a people, and that is what we do.

I will concentrate on the subjects raised by my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, rather than on the flexibility of ODA, which the hon. Members for Dundee West (Chris Law) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who chairs the International Development Committee, spoke about. How we deal

with that, and indeed how we look at what other Departments spend in relation to the delivery of ODA with a DFID interest, is an important separate debate that deserves at least an hour and a half of its own at some stage. I will be very happy if colleagues in all parts of the House put that forward for debate, so we can deal with it more fully. I will also deal with a number of issues that colleagues raised, not least resilience and preparedness, which a number of colleagues spoke about and which I will deal with in a bit more detail.

Since the Asian tsunami in 2004, DFID has mounted more than 30 humanitarian responses to both natural disasters and conflicts, including earthquakes in Nepal, Haiti, Pakistan and Indonesia, floods in India and the Balkans, hurricanes in Bangladesh, Burma, the Philippines and the Caribbean, conflicts in Yemen, South Sudan and Syria, and the Ebola outbreak in west Africa. DFID responds widely across an unstable world.

All colleagues mentioned the respect they have for those who go out and work for the United Kingdom abroad in those various areas. I echo that praise. It was very good that colleagues mentioned that. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton spoke of Jamie McGoldrick, who I spoke to just this week. He has done a remarkable job for OCHA, and I pay tribute to him and his colleagues who work in international organisations and are so important to us in finding out what is going on, and sometimes being in a position to say tougher things than nation states can say. I appreciate Jamie's work very much. I know where he is heading to next and he will not have a quiet life there, either. We appreciate what he does.

As a number of colleagues have mentioned, the past decade has seen the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance soar. The UN appeal for 2018 stands at \$22.5 billion—five times larger than the 2007 figure. That increase has been driven largely by two trends. First, the number of people affected by conflict, particularly within states, has increased, which has driven huge numbers of internally displaced people and refugees across Asia, Africa and the middle east. Secondly, crises are becoming increasingly protracted. In 1970, conflicts lasted an average of nine and a half years; today, that figure stands at 26 years. More than 80% of refugee crises now last for more than 10 years. That is putting huge strain on the system, let alone those who endure such misery.

National and local organisations are the first responders to disasters, but there will be occasions when those systems are overwhelmed by the circumstances facing them. That is why the Government are committed to maintaining the capability to provide bigger, better and faster responses to humanitarian emergencies: bigger because they are able to cope with more crises simultaneously, better by using a broader range of expertise, technologies and equipment to deliver bespoke responses to complex emergencies, and faster by quite simply reaching the people most in need as quickly as possible.

When needs are urgent, we adopt a “no regrets” policy to respond to disasters, meaning we take actions to kick-start a response before the full impact may be known, rapidly front-loading funding, relief supplies and expertise in order to save lives. We target our interventions to make sure they reach those who are most vulnerable: women and girls, children and those

with disabilities. To do that, DFID maintains a number of response capabilities, which have time and again proven their worth in responding to major disasters.

First, the emergency medical teams, which the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby and other colleagues mentioned in relation to what we saw over the Christmas and holiday period of the team that went to Cox's Bazar to assist those caught up in the camps with the outbreak of diphtheria. Through a partnership with the NHS, the fire and rescue service and the charity UK-Med, DFID is able to deploy doctors and nurses anywhere in the world to respond to humanitarian emergencies. Their expertise includes specialist surgeons, trauma experts, general medical or, in the case of the deployment to Bangladesh, public health and epidemiology. Thanks in no small part to their work, the outbreak of deadly diphtheria among the Rohingya refugees has now been curbed. I take this opportunity to thank them personally for the fantastic work they have done. They are a credit to their profession and to all of us.

Secondly, there is cross-Government work with the military. My hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine—indeed, my hon. and gallant Friend—rightly highlighted the crucial role of our armed forces in our disaster relief operations. We pay tribute to him and all his colleagues who serve in the forces. In September last year, a series of hurricanes hit the Caribbean; they were unprecedented. Although a certain amount can be predicted, which I will come to later, Hurricane Irma was the most powerful Atlantic hurricane ever recorded, causing devastation across the region, and hot on its heels were Hurricanes Jose and Maria, adding to the chaos and disruption.

The UK launched a massive response operation, with DFID, the Foreign Office and the military working hand in hand to deliver assistance, repair infrastructure and get the region back on its feet. Some of that assistance was already there: humanitarian advisers were in the region 24 hours before the hurricane struck; the Mounts Bay ship already had relief supplies loaded, and within 36 hours those supplies were going from the United Kingdom. Hundreds of tonnes of relief were delivered by civilian and military means, including via the Royal Navy's flagship HMS Ocean. Nearly 2,000 military personnel were able to deliver aid, maintain security and provide reassurance to affected communities.

The military have played a major part in responding to some of the most severe disasters of recent times. The men and women of our armed services have helped to construct Ebola treatment centres in Sierra Leone, fly aid to Nepal, rescue thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean and reach the most remote islands of the Philippines on HMS *Illustrious* after Typhoon Haiyan. That is perhaps an example of spending more widely that has a common interest, rather than just through DFID itself. Again, that is something we might explore in a further debate, to reassure colleagues that this expenditure, even if it comes from different Departments, is absolutely focused on the needs that DFID takes to be the most important. That co-operation is the result of regular training and careful planning between DFID and the Ministry of Defence. The two Departments have a memorandum of understanding that provides a simple mechanism for military assets to be quickly incorporated into emergency relief efforts when disaster strikes.

The UK does not respond alone. We work with the UN, non-governmental organisations, the Red Cross and other Governments to co-ordinate and deliver responses. Without those partners we would not be able to reach those most affected. OCHA is the key player in co-ordinating the UN's humanitarian agencies, managing activity in different response areas, such as health, shelter, water and sanitation. The hon. Member for Rochdale spoke of the problems with water in the camps in Bangladesh. I met officials this week to discuss our response to that and what more can be done in relation to the concerns about that and health. It is very much on the Department's agenda.

In relation to the European Union, the UK works closely with the directorate-general for humanitarian aid and civil protection in the EU Commission on many areas of humanitarian aid. DFID maintains regular engagement with the Commission and member states through its participation in the EU working party on humanitarian aid and food aid. As can be imagined, I have no intention of letting that relationship be lost in the events following March 2019.

We know that humanitarian assistance should be the exception, not the norm. Investing in countries' resilience and preparedness not only mitigates the impacts of disasters, but provides better value for money in the long term. DFID has been investing in countries' resilience for a number of years, and it forms a core part of our humanitarian aid reform policy. I will say a little more on that, because a number of colleagues raised it, and it is important.

We believe that development and climate finance can support countries and communities to better identify risks, as well as to prepare for and recover from disasters. Also critical is building strong health, education and social protection systems in developing countries, so that they are able to cope with crises. I will mention one or two areas where we are already working to deal with that.

In 2015, the UK committed to increasing its international climate finance by 50% over the next five years to at least £5.8 billion. It helps poor countries to adapt to climate change and promote jobs and livelihoods to reduce poverty. It will help to build the resistance of people, businesses and economies to increases in weather-related disasters or changes in climate trends. That money has already helped more than 21 million people to cope with the increased risk of droughts and floods.

We are investing in risk management tools, such as the index for risk management, and in insurance mechanisms, such as African Risk Capacity. We are also investing in climate science and modelling that will help us better to understand and predict risk, including through the science for humanitarian emergencies and resilience—helpfully, SHEAR—programme, which aims to advance the monitoring, assessment and prediction of natural hazards and risks across sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia. The building resilience and adaptation to climate extremes and disasters—BRACED—programme aims to benefit 5 million vulnerable people, especially women and children, in 13 developing countries. The centre for global disaster protection will build the financial resilience of developing countries to natural disasters.

In all the ways that I have described, we are recognising the truth of what hon. Members have said in relation to preparedness and we are on the ball. I thank hon.

[Alistair Burt]

Members who have spoken, and apologise for not being able to respond to them individually. I have outlined the world-class contribution to international disaster relief that the UK is able to make, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine for initiating this debate. Let me say two things in response. Although the debate has been on international disasters and in a way it is easy to convince the public that disaster relief is a good use of development aid, we have all recognised that development goes much further than just dealing with emergencies. We should be as proud of that as we are of dealing with the emergencies.

Yesterday, the Department said a sad farewell to Becky Dykes, with her memorial service. A DFID colleague, she lost her life in Beirut recently. Tributes were paid to her and her values and to the work in which she was engaged in Lebanon to improve the lives of those who, without her, would have had lives less well lived. Her life said so much about what all of us in this Chamber believe in, so we dedicate this debate to Becky and to all those like her, and we say thank you.

4.23 pm

**Andrew Bowie:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I associate myself very much with the words spoken by the Minister just now in paying tribute to all those people in DFID who give of their best in the work they do across the world.

I thank the Minister for his comprehensive comments and pay tribute to him and the Department for the work that they do across the world. I thank everyone who has contributed to this genuinely good-natured and consensual debate. I thank the hon. Members for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), and the hon. Member for

Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden), whom I welcome to the Front Bench and congratulate on his speech today. I also thank the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law); I apologise for not mentioning him before.

**Stephen Kerr:** And Stirling.

**Andrew Bowie:** I am coming to my hon. Friend.

I would like to concentrate on three points that were made. The first, which was made by quite a few hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Dundee West, was the huge humanitarian crisis that we face now. It is probably the biggest that we have faced since 1945 and responding to it presents challenges for every Government. The second point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford, who must have Aberdeenshire blood in him somewhere given how strongly he wants to account for every grain of rice that is being sent out by DFID.

I will end on the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) regarding the incredible generosity of the British people. Every year, they take our collective breath away with the amount of money and time that they are willing to give in order to send money overseas whenever crises occur. My hon. Friend pointed out that, last year alone, £97 million was donated by the British people for crises overseas and charitable works. It is on that point that I end the debate. I thank everyone very much for contributing to what has been a genuinely very good-natured and consensual debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the UK contribution to international disaster relief.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Will those who inexplicably are not staying for the next debate, on train services between Telford and Birmingham, please leave quickly and quietly?

## Train Services: Telford and Birmingham

4.26 pm

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered train services between Telford and Birmingham.

It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. It is also a great privilege to be able to come to this place and raise the concerns of the residents I represent, and to have a Minister come and listen to them. In this place, as we have just seen, we often debate issues of great national and global importance, and sometimes we forget to focus on the issues that have the greatest impact on the day-to-day lives of those we serve.

Telford, my constituency, is a vibrant, thriving and rapidly growing new town set in the heart of rural Shropshire, and this year it is celebrating its 50th anniversary. It has a unique identity and a proud industrial heritage as the birthplace of the industrial revolution. It is a shining example of what a successful new town can be. When Telford was designed half a century ago, it was intended to be self-sufficient, with all services, shopping and jobs provided locally. At that time, people were moving to Telford to get out of Birmingham, to live a better quality of life. However, the design of Telford in that way has meant that in many ways we are now cut off and somewhat isolated. Fifty years on, that self-sufficient model is not a model for a successful business centre, which requires excellent connectivity by both road and rail in order to thrive.

Telford has become a significant population centre and a very important business centre in the heart of the west midlands. It has inward investment, enterprise, commerce, advanced manufacturing and all sorts of hi-tech and new businesses coming to the area. Unemployment has halved and apprenticeships have doubled since 2010. With that, we should be experiencing good transport connectivity and rail networks fit for our growing new town, but sadly that is not the case.

Despite being surrounded by a rural hinterland of gorgeous Shropshire countryside, Telford is only 27 miles west of Birmingham, so we should be perfectly positioned for commuting to or leisure activities in Birmingham. We are next to the UK's second largest city and should be able to capitalise on that opportunity, yet it takes us 47 minutes to get from Telford to Birmingham by train. We have only two trains an hour, and they are spaced so that if we miss the one at eight minutes past the hour, we have to wait 45 minutes for the next train. The issue is not just the spacing. Once we are on the train, the service is slow. It is a stopping service. The train chugs along reluctantly, stopping at every little Shropshire village that it passes along the way, and often it has only two carriages, which will inevitably be full to bursting at peak times.

As Telford has grown, more and more people have chosen to come and build their lives there, and more and more people want to travel to Birmingham for both leisure and work, so overcrowding is all too common, with people often standing for the whole of the 47-minute journey.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Lucy Allan:** I shall be delighted to give way to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour.

**Mark Pritchard:** My hon. Friend rightly highlights the issues of the track and the capacity of the trains. Does she agree that, in addition, companies such as West Midlands Trains, which won the new franchise, need to look at stations—in particular, Albrighton and access to it, and Wellington, which has 750,000 passengers a year but where there is leaking at platform 1 and no toilet facilities outside opening hours? Some of those basic passenger experiences also need to be looked at—experiences on platforms as well as on the tracks and in the carriages.

**Lucy Allan:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is absolutely right. There is a great deal more work to be done and I feel that we have been somewhat neglected over the years in Telford and the surrounding areas. It is important that we address this now for the future of our area. That is why I have come to this place this afternoon.

The journey to Birmingham from London is one hour and 27 minutes or thereabouts, but trying to go on to Telford is a throwback to a completely different era. There is this slow, crowded stopping service, which takes 47 minutes, as I mentioned, and that is enough to move any commuter on to the road. The infrastructure investment has lagged behind our rapid population growth and our growth as a business centre. As you can imagine, Mr Hollobone, residents are regularly in contact with me to tell me about their struggles and their frustrations on a daily basis, so I want to give a voice to their experiences.

The train service between Telford and Birmingham simply does not meet the needs of a modern, thriving new town. In fact, Telford is the fastest growing new town in the country and the fastest growing town in the west midlands, yet we have had the same train service for as long as I and many others can remember, and it is not moving forward.

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I have experienced exactly the same issues in Stoke-on-Trent with the services into Birmingham, and we are seeing the same amount of growth. Would my hon. Friend agree that, if integrated properly, HS2 provides a significant opportunity to take many of the rail services from locations such as Stoke-on-Trent off that route, freeing up more paths on the route through Wolverhampton into Birmingham?

**Lucy Allan:** My hon. Friend raises an important point, because that part of the track around Wolverhampton is the reason we have these problems in Telford. I completely agree that if we can clear that track, we will have more opportunities for additional services on the line from Telford to Birmingham.

Five years ago the train service was just slow, irritating and inconvenient, as I have described. Now it is all those things, plus it is a real battle to even get on to the train during peak times. If Telford is to fulfil its true potential as an attractive place to live and work, we must have a 21st-century link to Britain's second largest city. It is just on our doorstep, but we cannot get there. We must have good connections to the rest of the country, and Birmingham is a gateway to do just that. That is imperative for our success to continue.

[Lucy Allan]

Over a number of years there has been a long debate around electrification. It has been discussed over and over. It has now been kicked into the long grass for this particular section of the track. In some ways that really is not the problem. What really matters to people who use the service is reliable peak-time trains that commuters can use to easily travel those 27 miles to Birmingham. The recent proposal to take Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs jobs from Telford to Birmingham exposed the very real challenges that commuters face daily. A 47-minute stopping service, irregularly spaced and with overcrowded carriages, makes people think twice before accepting a job in Birmingham. That is no good for people's income and no good for our economy. It is a lost opportunity. That is why connectivity is utterly essential to Telford's future. We do not want to be just an afterthought.

In Telford, we make a significant contribution to the west midland's economy and we have the potential to do so much more. I would say that we are the beating heart of Shropshire and the centre of gravity for the area, with new businesses choosing to locate in Telford and people choosing to move to Telford all the time. We are not just some sleepy county town on the way to Wales. We are a centre of innovation, enterprise and growth, but without the ability to easily get to Birmingham, we are cut off and it is holding us back.

Another aspect that I have not mentioned is trying to get back from Birmingham after a night out. That in itself is a massive struggle that puts people off going to Birmingham for the evening at all, because if the preceding train has just gone, they can be stranded at New Street station for up to an hour. Once on the train, it is back to the sluggish chugging along, stopping at every Shropshire village, and so on. That is not the 21st century. We should be able to go to Birmingham and enjoy a night out without thinking of the ordeal of getting back home.

I know that the Government are committed to improving rail services and delivering a rail service fit for the 21st century. We have had a change of provider in Telford—that happened last December—and the Minister will be glad to hear that we have experienced some improvements to our service, and many more are promised. We will have an additional train per hour with effect from December this year, and that is very welcome indeed. However, there is much more to do if our train service is to keep up with the needs of our town—as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard), who is not now in his place, mentioned.

We need more carriages. We need at least one fast train per hour, missing out those little Shropshire villages, for which there is no demand at all—I never see anyone getting on and off at these little stops between Telford and Birmingham. We also need sensible spacing of trains running in any one hour, to avoid lengthy periods between trains. It seems almost thoughtless to have two trains an hour running with a very short space between them.

As I have mentioned, our train service has failed to keep pace with Telford's development and growth. This is impacting on the everyday lives of ordinary people trying to go about their jobs and get to work. It inevitably impacts on the success of our town. One thing that I am absolutely delighted about—I am keen to raise this—is our fantastic new footbridge linking the station to the town centre. I am grateful to the Government for the

£10 million of funding for this wonderful, new bridge, which will transform the gateway to Telford and really change the way people perceive it as they enter into our town. The construction of the bridge from the station is well under way. People's experience of using the station will be totally transformed.

I know that the Minister has responsibility for roads, but I would be delighted if he could ask his colleague, the Minister with responsibility for rail, to find time in his diary to come to Telford and open our railway station footbridge later in the year. I urge the Minister and the train operators—both West Midlands Trains Ltd and Arriva Trains Wales—to please not forget about Telford. We are doing great things for the economy locally and nationally. We must have the connectivity to keep on doing what we are doing, to keep on bringing in jobs and to keep on growing the region.

When thousands of people's everyday lives are impacted by small issues that could be changed, we have to think seriously about why we are not doing it. There are some recommendations I would make today to our train operators—I hope they are listening, as well as the Minister. We need to drop some of the stops along the route to Birmingham. We are a business centre and we need to be able to go faster. This service is not a tourist stopping service to admire the attractions of Shropshire; we are talking about a function of business, and we must have that there. We must have enough carriages, because we cannot have only two carriages that are constantly overflowing. It is perfectly obvious that having an extra carriage would make all the difference. We must also have sensible spacing, particularly with the new train per hour, which is due in December. Trains need to be spaced sensibly around the whole hour, so that they do not all come at once. We must ensure that we do not have that 47-minute journey with a 45-minute wait between services.

Telford is an exciting place to live. Without doubt, it is one of the most successful towns in the midlands, economically and in terms of quality of life. As we celebrate our 50th anniversary in Telford and look to our future, we must ensure that our rail services match our economic growth and our huge ambitions for the future. That is essential if we are to continue to be the shining success story of what a new town should be. I will be grateful to hear what the Minister has to say.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** The debate may last until 4.56 pm. I call the Minister.

4.39 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** Thank you very much indeed, Mr Hollobone. It is a positive delight to serve under your chairmanship. It is also a delight to speak in a debate that falls 100 years after the granting of the vote to women and the successes of suffragism and the suffragettes, and 50 years after the founding of Telford as a new town. I can think of no better way of unifying those two ideas than in my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan).

**Lucy Allan:** I am absolutely delighted that the Minister has raised that point. I have not had the opportunity to put on record that a relative of mine called Janie Allan was a militant, socialist suffragette and was in Holloway,

where she was force-fed. It is thanks to her that so many of us are here today. I hope that you will forgive me, Mr Hollobone, for bringing that to a train debate.

**Jesse Norman:** I am honoured to be intervened on so early. I do not think I have ever been intervened on during the beginning of my introduction, but it was for such an honourable and honest cause. What a fantastic thing to say—I very much thank my hon. Friend for that.

It says more about my hon. Friend than I can that she has brought this debate at this juncture, and I congratulate her on it. It gives us an excellent opportunity to discuss rail services between Telford and Birmingham. She has built a formidable reputation as a vigorously campaigning and hard-working constituency MP on behalf of her local people, and it is easy to see why. I would not, judging by the gravamen of her speech, wish to live in one of those small villages that sit between Telford and Birmingham, but, with that small exception, her speech was very well made.

As the Chamber will know, I am responding on behalf of my colleague the Minister of State, Department for Transport, who is the rail Minister. Until very recently, he was steering the Space Industry Bill through the Commons on the Floor of the House, and he has therefore been unavoidably detained. I am sure that this is a debate that not merely colleagues and officials, but train operators, and West Midlands Trains in particular, are learning from and enjoying.

Let me pick up many of the themes that my hon. Friend has described. As she knows, and as she put well herself, the train came relatively late to Telford, because Telford itself was a new town. Since then, the town's Central station has become one of the biggest success stories in the west midlands. Since opening in 1986, the station has grown beyond all expectations and now caters for something like 1 million passenger journeys every year. As my hon. Friend said, that has created a degree of growing pains; in some respects the station is, in the best sense—to the extent that these things can have a best sense—a victim of its own tremendous success. In fact, those numbers make the station busier than some of the region's more established rail centres, including such storied names as Worcester Shrub Hill, Stratford-upon-Avon and Tamworth, to name but a few. It is a far cry from the days when the town's rail needs were met by the likes of New Hadley Halt and Wellington station, which was once even renamed "Wellington-Telford West" to indicate that it served the neighbouring new town.

As my hon. Friend knows, on 10 December last year West Midlands Trains took over the operation of the West Midlands franchise from the previous incumbent, London Midland. The new company, whose responsibilities include operating both of the stations in her constituency, has committed to £1 billion of investment across the west midlands to deliver better journeys for all.

With her characteristic focus on the here and now, my hon. Friend has pointed out that the issue is not, at this point, electrification, but the bread-and-butter matters of capacity and service. I think that is widely recognised. The new franchise, which will run until 2026, will see passengers in the west midlands benefit from £700 million of investment in new and refurbished trains, including 400 brand-new carriages. That will increase the size of

the fleet to 709 carriages from 563, and create space for an additional 85,000 passengers on rush-hour services, the majority of which will be in the west midlands.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard) will be thrilled to hear that a further £60 million is to be spent on improving facilities at stations, including providing over 1,000 new car parking spaces, as well as more room for people to park—I am delighted to say this as the roads and cycling Minister—their bicycles. Every station in the franchise will also benefit from new information screens, more than 800 of which will be installed by spring 2021. Passengers will be able to see real-time journey information, including on train loading, so that they can work out where to board and what to do during any disruption, although I am sure that is a remote possibility. Passengers will also benefit from ambitious targets for the roll-out of smarter and more convenient forms of ticketing, which should be available on 50% of all passenger journeys by 2020 and 90% by the end of the franchise term.

Should delays and cancellations occur, and they inevitably do from time to time, passengers' rights have also been strengthened. Compensation will now be available after delays of just 15 minutes or more, which is a marked improvement—of 50%, 100% or 200%, however it is counted—on the 30-minute threshold offered under the previous franchise. Eventually passengers will be able to make and receive compensation claims directly from an app, which will go hand in hand with the provision of free wi-fi on practically all trains.

The new franchise also plans to make great strides to break down the barriers to rail travel for those people who have restricted mobility. From 2020 the amount of notice required for passenger assistance will be halved to 12 hours, before falling to just four hours by 2021. By that date a trial of a turn-up-and-go service will also be undertaken. Other initiatives to recognise the railway as a community asset include an investment of £1.25 million to develop community rail initiatives, and a sustainability strategy to deliver a 49% reduction in carbon emissions and support the local supply chain.

As well as looking forward to better stations and more services, the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Telford will soon be able to enjoy more comfortable journeys on new trains. From 2020, 80 modern diesel carriages will be introduced to operate on services in and around Birmingham, including on the Telford line. In addition to offering a higher quality environment, these vehicles will have more seats than the carriages they are replacing, which should help to alleviate the rush-hour overcrowding that, as she mentioned, has resulted from the line's growing popularity.

I have spoken so far about the franchise-wide improvements, but the line from Telford to Birmingham will also be transformed thanks to changes to the timetable, enhancements to station facilities and additional rolling stock. In December 2018, West Midlands Trains will create a regular all-day half-hourly service between Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, calling at Telford. It will run from Monday to Saturday, and will complement the existing hourly service provided by the Wales and Borders franchisee, Arriva Trains Wales, making three trains per hour overall. I hope my hon. Friend will agree that that is a significant improvement, and it may go some way towards dealing with the dreadful situation she described of being stranded after an evening

[*Jesse Norman*]

on the town. At the same time, West Midlands Trains will introduce a regular hourly local service to Birmingham on Sundays, in place of the current irregular Wales and Borders service. Then, in May 2021, that will be increased to two local trains per hour, which when combined with the hourly long-distance service from Wales, will mean three trains an hour all week. All of that will be achieved while maintaining similar journey times to today.

A better service deserves a better station, and Telford Central station is set to benefit from a range of improvements over the next few years. By the summer of this year—again, I rejoice in this as the Minister concerned—a bike hire facility will be installed. This will allow locals and visitors alike to find out for themselves why the area is known as “the birthplace of industry” by taking a trip to the Ironbridge UNESCO world heritage site and its surroundings. This work will be complemented by an expansion in the number of cycle parking spaces at Telford Central, due to be completed in 2021, and the development of station travel plans for both Telford and Oakengates. Those are designed to help promote sustainable travel to and from the stations by bringing together initiatives into a co-ordinated package that is delivered through partnership between the rail industry, the local authority and other stakeholders. Car users will benefit from an expanded and modernised car park. One hundred new spaces are to be created, and an automatic number plate recognition system will be installed to make it easier for passengers to pay for their car parking.

My hon. Friend mentioned apprenticeships. She will be pleased to know that the new West Midlands franchise will create 900 new apprenticeships over its course, and that the ambition is that at least 20 of those engineering and driving apprentices—I hope that the engineering apprenticeships will, in part, be at the new university in Herefordshire—will be female.

Smarter payment solutions will not, however, be exclusive to the car park. New ticket machines equipped with smart ticket readers are to be installed at both Telford Central and Oakengates stations. That will complement the introduction of the other smart ticket products that I have already outlined.

We know that change has to meet passengers’ needs and that modernisation must reflect the reality of people’s lives. That is why, as part of improving the ticketing arrangements, we have listened to what passengers have asked for and are introducing flexible carnet products

from 2020. These will enable passengers to purchase a set number of journeys, and then redeem them as and when required.

Another common area of passenger feedback relates to the upkeep and repair of stations. Telford Central and Oakengates will be subject to a service quality regime that is designed to drive up station and customer service standards. The regime will be linked to cash penalties for the franchisee, and poor performance will result in money having to be reinvested in improving the customer experience. The same is true for Wellington station, which I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin would be grateful to hear if he were here.

The service quality regime will be overseen by West Midlands Rail, a consortium of 16 local authorities from across the region that has been created to lead rail transformation locally. Through a novel partnership arrangement, my Department and West Midlands Rail will jointly manage the new franchise, with West Midlands Rail taking the lead for services across the region, including those provided in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Telford.

The benefits of that collective but local focus can be seen right now, as a scheme is being delivered at Telford Central to better connect the station to the town and to create step-free access to all station platforms. That scheme, funded by my Department and delivered by Telford and Wrekin Council, is an excellent example of how partnership working between central Government and local government can enhance the lives of local people. That Telford and Wrekin Council is a member of West Midlands Rail is further cause for optimism for the town and its rail users.

Rail users in my hon. Friend’s constituency have much to look forward to. In the next few years, they will enjoy better and more frequent services all week on more comfortable trains and from more pleasant stations. Their rights will be defended not only by the tireless efforts of my hon. Friend, but by West Midlands Rail, which, as a devolved body, will be responsible for delivering local leadership for local services. The west midlands deserves the best possible rail service, and that is what my Department, my ministerial colleagues and my hon. Friend are determined to provide.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered train services between Telford and Birmingham.

4.51 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Free School Meals/Pupil Premium: Eligibility

4.56 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered future eligibility for free school meals and the pupil premium.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. With the support of my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George), I called this debate because of our serious concerns about the Department for Education's consultation, "Eligibility for free school meals and the early years pupil premium under Universal Credit". Those concerns arose following my oral question on universal credit and free school meals to the new Secretary of State last week, when, unfortunately, he completely missed my point.

The Government are disregarding the concerns of many in this House and outside it that their actions will push more children into poverty. Labour Members know that poverty is not an inevitability, but a symptom of failure to harness political will, think innovatively and take bold steps forward. This whole issue encapsulates that neatly. In my contribution, I will focus on the concerns flagged up by the consultation's proposals and discuss what should be done to mitigate those concerns and why.

In my letter to the consultation, I said that I am a huge supporter of rolling out hot and healthy universal free school meals for all children—I always have been. That will be no surprise to hon. Members, who know that I have banged on about my support for wider access and the provision of free school meals for more than a decade now, and I will continue to do so until all children receive a hot and healthy meal in the dinner hall.

In the current transition to universal credit, all families claiming the new benefit are entitled to free school meals, which is great, but the Department's consultation aims to roll forward that reform by rolling back one of its most progressive measures. By removing the universal entitlement to free school meals under universal credit and introducing a £7,400 threshold for eligibility for free school meals, the Government are forcibly creating a cliff edge that will be detrimental to families, especially children. That seems utterly ludicrous.

As the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), wrote when the White Paper on universal credit was published in 2010:

"At its heart, Universal Credit is very simple and will ensure that work always pays and is seen to pay. Universal Credit will mean that people will be consistently...better off for each hour they work and every pound they earn."

The Opposition do not disagree at all with the principles that he set out, but sadly, the reality has failed to live up to the promise made eight years ago. We all know lots of the reasons behind that, which ultimately led to him resigning, but that is a whole other story.

The proposals set out in the consultation are diametrically opposed to that 2010 vision and what it was meant to achieve, especially around making work pay. To give one example of how the proposal will be detrimental:

someone with three children in their family who earns just below the £7,400 threshold is set to lose out on £1,200 in free school meals if they work only a few hours more or get a pay rise. The family's annual wages would have to increase from £7,400 to almost £11,000 to make up for what they lost by rising above the eligibility cliff edge—a problem that would not occur under the working tax credit system because the legacy benefits system provides an offsetting income boost at the point that free school meals are withdrawn. Under universal credit, however, there is no equivalent mitigation.

Another example, provided to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak and me by the fabulous Dr Sam Royston of the Children's Society, is that a single parent with no housing costs and one child would be £26 better off per week under the old working tax credit system than under universal credit. The Minister may think £26 per week a meagre amount, but for many outside this place it can determine whether or not they can eat or heat their home. The child of the single parent in Dr Royston's example is not entitled to free school meals either under working tax credits or under the proposed universal credit rules, so it may seem that they will be no worse off, but the only way they can be so entitled is if the transitional plans are made permanent, so that all children in a family that claims universal credit receive free school meals.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend will be aware—as I am, since I represent a rural area—that one of the problems with free school meals is how many parents will not claim them because of stigma. Does she agree that changing to universal credit will only make that worse?

**Mrs Hodgson:** Yes. One of my reasons for supporting universal free school meals is that the stigma would be removed. It was proved in the excellent school food plan commissioned under the former Education Secretary, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), that that was one of the benefits of universal free school meals. The poorest kids, who are entitled to them anyway, are the ones who benefit the most.

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): As a teenager, I was entitled to free school meals, but because of the stigma I did not take them. I used to refuse to queue up for my token, so I went without, which resulted in my developing a very controlling relationship with food and a lot of problems at home. I totally support my hon. Friend's proposal, because free school meals for all children will mean that they all get a healthy meal and the stigma will disappear.

**Mrs Hodgson:** I totally agree. The same system should apply for all children who are entitled to universal credit, although wider access is another debate.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): I completely agree about the stigma; I raised the same point with the Minister the other day in the Chamber. However, does the hon. Lady agree that there is another way? Instead of enfranchising everybody, we could have an auto-enrolment scheme that was linked to the benefits system, rather than a system of people self-declaring as eligible.

**Mrs Hodgson:** I agree about auto-enrolment: parents should not have to apply. However, the point that I am trying to make is that any family eligible for universal credit should automatically get free school meals through auto-enrolment. If the cliff edge is brought in, it would be detrimental to that vision that we probably all share.

**Dr Dan Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the more we spend on the administration costs of the proposed system, the less money will go towards the pupils? Having an easier system would mean we could spend more of the money on what it should be spent on: the meals that we want children to have.

**Mrs Hodgson:** I absolutely agree. Administering the cliff edge will mean huge costs. We should learn from the current system for free school meals for infants.

I am aware that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so I had better get back to setting out my concerns. What we want to prevent is families avoiding pay rises or working more hours for fear that they will lose out. That is not making work pay, and it is not what the system was intended to do when it was set up. If the Minister and his Department, alongside the Department for Work and Pensions, were truly in favour of making work pay, they would at the very least have made provision to avoid that issue—even keeping the status quo would work. They have known about the problem for seven years; I have banged on about it for years, and so have my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak, since before she was an MP, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) and other hon. Members. Sadly, it seems that the Government are keen to power on without even considering the impact of their policies on a child's life. It would be welcome if the Minister set out how he believes the threshold and its implications are consistent with the Government's aim to make work pay.

Another concern about the consultation is the figure of 50,000 more children who we keep hearing will benefit from free school meals by 2022. On the surface, it is welcome that the Government have estimated that more children will be receiving free school meals under their plans, but it is deeply concerning that analysis by the Children's Society has found that more than 1 million children living in poverty would miss out on a free school meal because of the cliff edge. In the consultation document, the Government say that 50,000 children will benefit by the end of the roll-out, when the transitional protections are at their capacity. Herein lies the crux of the problem: the document also states that 10% of children—113,000—will lose out on free school meal entitlement. That is because children will fall off once the transitional protections come to an end, as they move from primary school, where they will have the protection when it comes in, to secondary school, where their entitlement will end.

I would therefore welcome clarity from the Minister about how he will protect children who risk losing their free school meals when they move from one stage of their education to the next. If he cannot give us answers in this debate—that would be a shame, but I am aware that time will be an issue—I would be more than happy to take him up on his offer to meet me if he is still happy to do so. I am very grateful that he made that commitment.

I want to offer the Minister a solution, which I have already touched on. It makes total sense for the current transitional system to be made permanent so that all the children in a family on universal credit receive free school meals. That would not generate any extra bureaucracy, it would be fairer and it would help make work pay. It would be exactly what the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green intended when he envisaged and enacted the policy. It would negate any of the concerns that I have mentioned and that other hon. Members may mention. It would push the cliff edge to a much higher earnings threshold and overcome the fear of deductions from earnings, which turn the Government's proposals against making work pay. We do not want people to refuse pay rises or extra work for fear that they will lose three lots of free school meals.

That is not the only reason to maintain the status quo. Free school meals also have significant benefits for a child's life. I will never miss an opportunity to sing the praises of the universal principle of free school meals. As several hon. Members have already mentioned, they reduce stigma. In its response to the consultation, School Food Matters quoted the comments of a headteacher about how universal infant free school meals had reduced stigma:

“Despite being in an affluent London borough, 27% of the children at our school are currently entitled to free school meals but nearer 40% have been entitled to free school meals within the past 6 years.”

That is what matters for the pupil premium. The headteacher went on to say:

“This is a clear indicator that many of the families are only just about managing.”

This shows that if the Minister goes ahead with the current proposals, we could see more and more of the “just about managing”—the JAMs, who the Prime Minister referred to in her first speech on the steps of 10 Downing Street—being left behind. Would that not go against what this Government are all about?

The Minister knows that I have a keen interest in supporting children from low-income families by giving them healthy meals, both in term time and in the holidays. We had the excellent private Member's Bill promoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and I know that the Minister is considering pilots with regard to it, which is very welcome. By implementing my proposal, the Government would ensure that those children have access to a healthy meal that would benefit their education, their health and their wellbeing.

The evidence is out there and I am sure that the Minister has a copy of the school food plan lying around in his office; if he has not, I have a spare one, or I am sure that I get John Vincent or Henry Dimbleby, its writers, to send him one. I advise him strongly to go away and read it, as it is excellent from cover to cover, especially chapter 11, which is about the benefits of free school meals. In said chapter, there are references to the evaluations of the free school meal pilots established by the last Labour Government under Ed Balls, which showed that there was a 23% increase in vegetable consumption, a 16% decline in the consumption of soft drinks—because there were no packed lunches—and an 18% decline in the consumption of crisps. Those pilots also benefited a child's education, with children in

receipt of a free school meal in the pilot areas on average two months ahead of their peers outside the pilot areas and 2% more children reaching their target levels in maths and English at key stage 1, while at key stage 2 the impact was between 3% and 5%. If we want to close the attainment gap, there is nothing better than to start by making sure that the kids are all fed.

**Michelle Donelan:** The hon. Lady says “there is nothing better”, but potentially there is: breakfast. All the studies show that disadvantaged children perform a lot better once they have had a breakfast, and in fact children in middle-class families and higher-earning families, where the parents are busy and going off to work, often suffer as well, because they are not getting that important breakfast, which is, after all, the most important meal of the day.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Absolutely—the hon. Lady will not be surprised to learn that I totally agree with what she just said. However, I do not see it as an either/or situation, as I want both those things; I want children to be getting their breakfasts and then getting their lunches. When there were the pilots for universal free school meals, lots of schools could manage to provide both, because even when there was an offer of universal free breakfasts, not all of the children had them; only about 18% to 20% of the children took up that offer. It is very affordable to provide such breakfasts and usually it is the children who really need them who take them, whether they are from busy working families or from poor families. It is a very good policy.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mrs Hodgson:** Yes—for the last time.

**Alex Cunningham:** I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree with me that instead of cutting back breakfast clubs we should be developing them. However, there is also the issue of “holiday hunger” throughout the summer period, the Christmas period, Easter and everything else, and we really should look to develop policies in that regard rather than cutting back.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Yes. My hon. Friend might not have realised what I was referring to before; it was to the private Member’s Bill promoted by our right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead on holiday meal provision, which the Minister has committed to running some pilots on. Hopefully, they will prove that point.

On the benefits of universal free school meals, I will just add that when they were piloted, the most marked academic improvements were among children from less affluent backgrounds. That is a very important point to make.

I think the Minister is a common-sense kind of guy; I have found that in my dealings with him in all-party groups that we have worked in together over the years. So I am sure that, on hearing the figures that I have cited, he will agree that the reason for all of this work is that children are more attentive and ready to learn, because they have a healthy meal in their tummies that is fuelling their learning.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Hodgson:** I am just about to finish.

The proposals in the consultation would jeopardise all of that, because those children would have to go back to bringing in packed lunches and only 1% of packed lunches meet the nutritional requirements that our fabulous school food does now. It has been improved beyond recognition.

I will give way to the hon. Lady very quickly.

**Helen Whately:** I know that the hon. Lady is just coming to the end of her remarks, but I just wanted to pick her up on one thing. She is making compelling arguments for the benefits of free school meals and breakfasts. I think that many of us would support her in wanting to make sure that children are well fed at school. However, she has not touched on the costs of doing those things, the trade-offs, and the choices that might have to be made to ensure that a generous supply of free school meals is available.

**Mrs Hodgson:** The hon. Lady might not be aware, because I do not think that she was a Member at the time, but after the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath commissioned the school food plan, he agreed with all 17 of its recommendations. He put money to 16 of them straight away and the 17th one was for universal free school meals; he accepted the arguments for that recommendation and said he would provide money for it when it could be found. Money was found for universal infant free school meals, under the coalition agreement with Nick Clegg, and those meals were introduced.

The point has already been made; it has been proved. The money can be found, because universal free school meals more than pay for themselves, and the benefits that we get from them outweigh the initial costs, including the amount saved on administration because they are universal. There are a whole host of arguments around this issue, but in a sense I am detracting from what this debate is about, so I will conclude.

I hope that the Minister has been listening intently; in fact, I am sure he has, because he has looking at me and I have seen he is. I hope he will do the same with other speakers. The new system was presented as a way to eradicate poverty, but instead the introduction of the measure that we have been discussing could cement poverty in our society, and at worst there could even be a rise in poverty among “working poor” families. If that happens, we would go through all these changes for naught, and children would be just as badly off in the future—maybe even worse off—and that would be at the behest of the Government. I am sure that is not what they want, so I hope that the Minister will look at this issue seriously and perhaps think again, for the sake of the children out there who we are all here to support.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** I have to call the first of the Front-Bench speakers no later than 5.36 pm. Eight Members are seeking to catch my eye, one of whom had not informed the Speaker’s Office beforehand that they wished to speak in this debate. If we are going to get everyone in, I am afraid that there will have to be a short limit on speeches of two minutes and thirty seconds.

5.16 pm

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Let me begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for securing this debate and for eloquently and forcefully putting across the reasons for it and the flaws in how things are processed.

I want to discuss this issue in context of my region. The Greater Manchester area has the highest rate of child poverty in the country. I have three concerns about the Government's proposed changes to the eligibility criteria for free school meals. First, and from a regional perspective, the areas worst affected by child poverty stand to lose the most from the proposed changes. Places with among the highest rates of child poverty, such as my constituency of Manchester, Gorton, will have a high number of children who are no longer eligible for free school meals. The effects of this will need to be picked up by already-stretched local councils and charities.

Secondly, the Government are turning their back on the 10% of pupils from poor households who would not be eligible for free school meals under the proposed changes. In the city of Manchester, there are 5,000 children eligible for free school meals under universal credit who would not be eligible under the proposed criteria. Thirdly, the Government are undermining their own principle that universal credit should make work pay. In some cases, taking on additional work would mean families ending up on a lower overall income, instead of people being rewarded for working harder.

Changes to universal credit are already projected to push a million more children into poverty by 2022. We must not additionally take away the right for children in poverty to access free school meals.

5.18 pm

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing this debate. She is a very strong advocate for helping children in our schools, and although I do not agree with everything she said, I support the direction she is moving in.

One thing that we can agree on is that the legacy system is not fit for purpose. It has many peculiarities, one of the most perverse of which is that the children of those on working tax credits do not receive free school meals. That means that somebody working 16 hours a week on the national minimum wage might have a take-home pay of £120, but they might live next door to a family in which somebody is working 15 hours a week on £25 an hour and taking home £375 a week, and yet their family still gets universal credit. The system absolutely must be reformed to make it fairer.

Under the circumstances, finding a threshold is probably the most cost-effective way, although it brings problems, as the hon. Lady has highlighted. There has to be a cut-off, and it is much better done in terms of income rather than hours, but that creates a cliff edge. This is a policy area where unless one goes to the extreme recommendation of giving all children free school meals, it is like being on the Old Man of Hoy—there is a cliff edge in every direction. There is a cliff edge at the end of universal credit or when someone moves on to working tax credits or at £7,400. The line must be drawn somewhere,

and it is best drawn where more children will be on free school meals after the reform than there were before. In the long term, there may be a technological solution, whereby every child has a charge card. That would get over the problem of stigma, as everyone would pay in the same way. No one would know how much money the state was putting in, and it could be tapered. We could create a genuine universal credit.

Finally, I very much respect the hon. Lady's position, and I look forward to hearing from the Labour Front Bench whether the Opposition support it. If so, where will they find the £600 million that the Resolution Foundation has said the meals will cost, or the £6.2 billion that would be required to give everyone the pupil premium, because it is a passporting benefit? Given the fiscal responsibility rule, that would have to come from additional taxation. The millions watching on parliamentlive.tv deserve to know where that taxation will come from.

5.21 pm

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who has done great work on child poverty and school meals. I am proud to be standing here on the anniversary of women's suffrage. This debate is on exactly the sort of issue that women were given the vote for and to stand in Parliament to speak on. The issue hits children most of all, but women primarily and in particular single parents.

I was shocked to read the consultation document, having worked on universal credit for many years. One of the best things about universal credit was the fact that all children on universal credit were entitled to a free school meal. I applaud the fact that the coalition Government legislated for that. It would be a backwards step to look to take that away and introduce a cliff edge at just £7,400 a year of earnings, which is equivalent to just 18 hours a week on the minimum wage. Under universal credit, someone loses 63% of everything they earn. If someone on a low wage is only getting 37% of what they earn back into their pocket and is losing free school meals for their children—those are worth on average £429 for one child and £858 for two children—that is a huge disincentive to work.

I urge the Minister to look into the work of the Children's Society. It has calculated that a single parent with two children would need to earn £11,000—that is, £4,000 more—to overcome that cliff edge under universal credit. That is no incentive to work, and a million children in poverty will not gain the free school meals that they need. A family in poverty cannot afford to feed their children to the best nutritional standards, as they would want to do. A free school breakfast would help.

**Michelle Donelan:** I agree with the hon. Lady about those in poverty, but those moving from working tax benefits on to universal credit could be earning up to £40,000 as a household, if not more. Is it appropriate that we give those households free school meals, or is that a misuse of resource?

**Ruth George:** The vast majority of parents moving from tax credits on to—

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Order. I call Stephen Lloyd.

5.23 pm

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I greatly appreciate the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). The frustration with this issue is that the whole concept behind universal credit is about making work pay. It was defenestrated in 2015 by George Osborne removing the £3 billion and doing it per annum from the work allowance, so it does not make work pay an awful lot. There are lots of clunky bits within universal credit, which I have talked about ad nauseam and which just seem to get worse and worse, which is rather frustrating. Then there are free school meals, which are a tremendous success, yet the Government may well be laying a statutory instrument that will fundamentally not make work pay.

The estimated cost that parents will be paying for a child is £400 if their income is beyond the income floor of £7,400. Imagine I have an income of just over £7,500 and three children. That makes £1,200 before I even get out of bed. Does that make work pay? No, it does not. The rational decision by the parent or parents will be: "What's the point? There's no point me doing that extra bit of work and going over £7,500." That is totally counterproductive.

Unusually for me, I ask the Minister on behalf of the Government to go swinging back to the Treasury and to say to his esteemed colleague, "Government, do nothing." I know that there are various erroneous, scurrilous rumours going around Parliament and Westminster these days that the Government are not doing an awful lot, but in this case I urge the Minister to do nothing at all. He should not introduce the statutory instrument. The Government should let all children who will be going on to universal credit receive free school meals. I know that would cost £500 million to £600 million, but under the old system things remained the same, because when people went beyond 16 hours the working tax credit made up the difference. I urge the Minister to go back to the Treasury and say, "Do nothing. Let all children on universal credit receive free school meals."

5.26 pm

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I, too, want to refer to the work incentive, because improving it was supposed to be the fundamental advantage of universal credit. That was set out fully and ably by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) from 2010 onwards. For example, the document "21st Century Welfare", which was published in July 2010, states in chapter 2 that

"someone at the National Minimum Wage would be less than £7 per week better off if they worked 16 extra hours...A system that produces this result cannot be right."

We all agreed with the right hon. Gentleman about that, yet the universal credit system, which is supposed to remove all these problems, will introduce a benefit trap far worse than anything in the legacy system. There is nothing in the legacy system under which someone earning a few hours of extra work will end up hundreds of pounds worse off because they have lost their free school meals.

**Alex Burghart**: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Timms**: I do not think I can, given the time limit, but I want to comment on the point that the hon. Gentleman made in his speech. He suggested that the answer could be an electronic card system and the contribution to school meals could be tapered away with the universal credit taper. I made that proposal in the Welfare Reform Bill Committee on 13 June 2011, when I moved new clause 3. I was making exactly the point that a fixed-income threshold for entitlement to free school meals is disastrous for work incentives. There is some merit in his suggestion that that would be a long-term solution, but I suggested it seven years ago, which I am afraid is a reflection of the failure of Ministers. Seven years on, they have not come up with a solution to this very serious problem.

The difficulty is that universal credit was never seen as a whole-of-Government initiative. When the Government that many now on the Opposition Benches supported introduced tax credits, it was a whole-of-Government initiative. Gordon Brown made sure of that. Under this Government, universal credit is a matter for the DWP, so the Minister present no doubt feels that it is not for him to worry about work incentives in the social security system. However, he should be worried about this issue, and I hope he will change his policy.

5.28 pm

**Ms Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing the debate.

This Government have presided over a total failure to address this country's economic flaws, to the extent that food banks are now a major food supplier in Britain. Free school meal eligibility is linked to the pupil premium, which is a valuable source of school funding for the most deprived schoolchildren, so it would be a casualty of the proposal. The free school meal consultation, which would see the earnings threshold for free school meals eligibility lowered to £7,400 per year, is a result of a flaw in the design of universal credit. The legacy benefit system contained an in-built trigger for free school meal eligibility. All children whose families are on universal credit receive free school meals, so the Government are trying to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Has the Minister not considered that such a low threshold for free school meal eligibility is, in fact, a disincentive for parents to seek additional work? With school meals costing £437 per year, per child, undertaking an extra two hours of low-income work is not financially prudent for any parent. I urge the Minister to consider the human consequences of Government plans, in terms of physical and mental health and quality of life. Will he commit to maintaining free school meals eligibility for all children whose families are on universal credit?

Universal credit was a noble ambition, and Labour did not question the principle of it, but it has been executed so poorly that it has impoverished many people in the communities where it has been rolled out, to the extent that the use of food banks has risen by 30% six months on. It is a sad indictment of the Government that food poverty is having such a profound impact on children. In 2017, some food banks reported that more than 40% of their beneficiaries were children.

[*Ms Marie Rimmer*]

I point the Minister to the 2015 autumn statement, which committed the Government to maintaining pupil premium spending at current rates until 2020. Will he guarantee that spend, should this policy be implemented?

5.31 pm

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): I, too, am proud of the work done by my north-east colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). This policy means that the Government expect families that are already struggling to find around £10 per week for each of their children to enjoy a school meal, or resort to cheap sandwiches and other rubbish to ensure that they are fed. I ask the Minister: which element of the universal credit payment will cover that cost, which runs to £800 for a family with two school-age children for a school year? No wonder we cannot find a charity that supports the policy. I ask the Minister whether the Government really think that successive Governments enhanced free school meal provision just for the fun of it. Do the Government truly believe that there was not strong evidence to back such a policy? Do they not understand that these changes will mean hungry children on their watch?

I am not one to be kindly towards the Government, who are responsible for the escalating number of children in poverty in the UK, but today I am prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps, as with many other policies related to children, the Government have just not understood the consequences of their proposals. They need to act now, before we have a hunger crisis in our schools. I know that the Minister will say that no child currently on free school meals will be taken off them, but it is about the future and the next group of children, whose parents are public sector workers—cleaners, car park attendants, shop workers and so on. All of them have seen little growth in their income for nearly 10 years. Does he not agree that it would be bizarre to have two children in the same class, one who is getting fed, and one who is not, despite their families having the same income?

This morning, I met with the British Association of Social Workers. Its new research shows that poverty can result in parents being judged unable to care for their children and seen to be neglecting them. That in turn can lead to more children ending up in care, and possibly even adopted, because there was insufficient food on the table. How, in the 21st century, can it be right that a child is removed from their family just because they are poor? That policy, or more accurately that cut, is both shameful and destructive. The Government cannot claim to be providing anything for the next generation, except the erosion of public services, a reduction in social mobility and, now, the erasure of attainment in schools, by removing a positive policy that has changed many millions of children's lives for the better.

Today, the Minister could accept that children will suffer under these school meal proposals. I just hope that he is listening, and that the Government will put the matter right.

5.34 pm

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank

my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for securing today's important debate.

We have been told many times by the Government that universal credit was designed to make work pay. These plans tell a different story. Universal credit was supposed to mean no cliff edges, so it would always be worth a household working extra hours to earn more. Free school meals are worth £437 per child, so even for a household with a single eligible child, taking just an extra hour of work per week on the national minimum wage would mean a loss of income under the new proposals. The Children's Society estimates that a million children will miss out on free school meals under the new proposals. It is therefore not a case of work paying, but of some of the poorest children in society paying for another Tory policy that is set to bring yet more anguish and confusion to the botched universal credit roll-out.

Headteachers have voiced concerns that the proposed scheme would be complicated to manage and confusing for parents. Clearly the Government have not learned from their poor general election results. I remember the parody "strong and stable Tories steal the food from the children's table" doing the rounds in response to the Tory manifesto policy to axe free school meals. The Government should know that they have no mandate to reduce school meals, and it makes no sense to do so.

Last summer, 47% of children who received support from food banks in the Trussell Trust's network were between five and 11 years old, and 4,412 more three-day emergency food supplies were given to children during the summer holidays than in previous months. We know that children on free school meals already underperform in schools. Why would any Government choose to make life more difficult and more challenging for those children? Why would a Government that claim to want to tackle inequality, to help the disadvantaged, to tackle child obesity and to help out the "just about managing" come up with a policy that does the exact opposite?

I agree with the Child Poverty Action Group, which has said that the Government have missed an opportunity to alleviate the crisis by increasing the eligibility and uptake of free school meals, ensuring that all children from low-income households receive a nutritious meal at lunchtime. If a family is in need of universal credit, it stands to reason that the children should be eligible for free school meals. It is just another example of the Government using the universal credit system to make the poorest in society, including children in working households, even worse off.

5.36 pm

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): I commend the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing the debate. It is a great shame that a significant number of people who wanted to contribute for longer than a couple of minutes could not. I encourage the hon. Lady to take the matter forward so that the debate can be continued under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee, because it is clearly an important topic. As I intimated to you, Mr Hollobone, I will speak for only three minutes, as I wanted to reduce my time to allow others to get in earlier on.

I welcome the Minister and wish him well as he takes on his new role in the Department. Summing up, we have had excellent speeches from the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) and the hon. Members for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), for High Peak (Ruth George), for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin).

As probably the youngest Member currently in the Chamber, when I saw that the debate was on free school meals it conjured up images of the mince and tatties and the custard that we had at Milncroft Primary in Glasgow. I should declare an interest, as I am married to a teacher, so I have first-hand experience of my wife coming home and telling me about the importance of free school meals and breakfast clubs. I pay tribute to my colleague on Glasgow City Council, Councillor Norman MacLeod, who has passionately argued for free school meals, and I echo what the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West said in that regard.

Before touching on a couple of things relating to Scotland—I know at this stage hon. Members normally groan, but unfortunately the third party summing-up rights mean that we have to take part in these debates, which is why I will try to keep my remarks brief—I will touch on three particular issues. The hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) made the point about money, and I think the same point was made by the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately). I took part in last night's debate about the orders introduced by the Government, particularly on social security and pensions. In my time in the House I have already seen the Government pursue a benefits freeze, the 1% public sector pay cap, the barbaric rape clause and the medieval two-child policy. A number of hon. Members in today's debate made the point that we should be looking after people on the lowest rungs of society, and the most vulnerable in society.

I am conscious of time, but I want to draw attention to the fact that in Scotland, with cross-party support, we have introduced legislation that enshrines a target for reducing child poverty by 2030. I would like to see this Government do that as well.

I say to the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West to keep going on with this. It has been a good debate, but we need cross-party consensus. Today is the beginning of that, not the end.

5.39 pm

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his place in his new Department. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). She is a tireless campaigner as the chair of the all-party group on school food and she has shone a light for many years on this issue. She is also the first Sharon in the 100 years of women being elected to this place, so I congratulate her on that, too. I heard her on Radio 4 a few weeks ago when she was campaigning on secondary ticketing. Unfortunately, the grammar school and private school-educated kids could not get around the fact they were talking to a Sharon. Anybody who was in the Chamber on Friday when she gave her personal testimony in the debate on the registration of stillborn children will

know that I have heard nothing more powerful in this place for many years. I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate.

I doubt that anyone would dispute the importance of a benefit as wholesome as school meals. As a former primary school teacher, I saw the difference between those kids who got a full school meal and those who brought the rubbish in the packs—the chocolate and the drinks. I actually saw the impact on the difference in attainment during the afternoon. Governments have worked—together with Jamie Oliver—to improve nutritional values in school meals. We know that the provision of free school meals helps to reduce health inequalities, focuses attention in the classroom and brings benefits to attainment. As I said, I have seen it in my own experience.

The Government cannot deny that 1 million children living in poverty in working families are on these benefits. Those both in and beyond this place have outlined the conundrum carefully. By setting a net earnings threshold of £7,400 per annum to determine eligibility for free school meals under universal credit, the Government are contradicting their own stated aim of universal credit, which is to make work pay. If a household is earning just under £7,400 and has the chance to earn slightly more money, the Government are presenting working families with a cliff edge. There are clear questions the Minister needs to answer.

**Ruth George:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the example in the consultation document of a parent gaining free school meal eligibility is misleading? When they transfer from tax credits to universal credit, they will lose £1,600 a year. Those are not the children who should not be getting free school meals.

**Mike Kane:** I cannot agree more with my hon. Friend. We talked about cliff edges. What assessment has the Minister made of the cliff edge issues? In particular, how many children will be affected and how much will it cost families to make up the shortfall?

A second and connected issue has been flagged in the debate: the pupil premium. Pupil premium is additional funding targeted at raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. It is currently targeted at children registered as eligible for free school meals, looked-after children and children who have had a parent in the regular armed forces at any point since 2012. Since the introduction of universal infant free school meals, schools have been missing out on that vital additional resource, as parents do not need to register for free school meals, which is the basis on which pupil premium is calculated. For schools already experiencing real-terms cuts to their funding, that is a vital additional resource that they can ill afford to miss out on.

**Michelle Donelan:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is time we broke the link between free school meals and the pupil premium and broadened the calculations for the pupil premium, so that it also includes social disadvantages such as bereavement, mental health problems, divorce and so on, which can affect attainment?

**Mike Kane:** We will broaden it out and should have more, not fewer, children on free school meals. That was clearly our policy in our manifesto in June.

**Alex Burghart:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mike Kane:** I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman, although I would say that only a former policy adviser would frame a question in the way that he did.

We know that for disadvantaged pupils having a full belly helps them perform. We had a fully costed manifesto at the general election, unlike the Conservative party, which—on its insult and injury tour—was taking away free school meals and making sure that it had no costed proposals for it. Labour would reintroduce free school meals as a universal benefit across the system so that we get proper learning and attainment in our school system. We cannot afford not to do it.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Will the Minister conclude his remarks no later than 5.54 pm, so that Sharon Hodgson has two minutes to sum up the debate? I call the Minister.

5.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) on securing this important debate. I thank all colleagues who have spoken today, including the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) and the hon. Members for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin).

I worked closely with the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West on the all-party parliamentary group on water safety and drowning prevention. I hope we can continue to work closely today. May I also say how moved I was by her heartfelt speech in the debate on the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc.) Bill last week? It really moved the whole House, and people beyond.

Today's debate is timely, as we have considered the responses to our public consultation on changing the entitlement criteria for free school meals and the early years pupil premium. I will be publishing the Government response shortly. It is all part of the drive to ensure every child has the opportunity to make the most of their life, no matter where they live or their background.

Let me start by restating the importance this Government attached to providing hot, nutritious free school meals to the most disadvantaged children. We are committed to continuing to provide those meals to families in need. Last year, about 1.1 million disadvantaged children in our communities were eligible for and were claiming a hot free meal, which saves families around £400 per year, as we have already heard today.

Under the existing benefits-based criteria, children whose parents or guardians receive one or more of the qualifying benefits, such as income support, jobseeker's allowance and child tax credits, can make a claim to a school and are entitled to receive a hot meal. However, the simplification of the welfare system through the introduction of universal credit means that a number of the benefits that currently entitle families to free school meals will cease to exist.

To ensure that any families moving on to universal credit in the early stages of roll-out in the pilot areas, which we have heard much about today, did not lose out on their entitlement, in 2013 universal credit was added temporarily to the list of qualifying benefits for free school meals pending the introduction of the eligibility criteria. The same temporary measure was introduced for the early years pupil premium when that additional funding for disadvantaged three and four-year-olds was first introduced in 2015, and for the free early years entitlement for two-year-olds, which my Department has consulted on separately. As planned, we now need to replace the temporary measure with clear eligibility criteria under universal credit as its national roll-out accelerates.

In setting the new criteria we have followed five clear principles. First, our approach must protect children from a sudden loss of a hot meal as a result of the changes. Secondly, our approach must be fair in how it treats children and families, and target our support most effectively to those on very low incomes. Thirdly, it must enable more children to benefit from these entitlements. Fourthly, it should be as straightforward as possible, both for parents to understand and for schools to deliver. Last, but by no means least, it must be consistent with the approach the Government have taken to determining eligibility for other passported benefits as universal credit is rolled out.

**Stephen Timms:** Will the Minister give way?

**Alex Cunningham:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I have a lot to say. Forgive me—I will try to address some of the issues that hon. Members have brought up in the debate. I will make some headway and see where we are on time.

Based on those principles, the proposal we have consulted on is to introduce an earnings threshold for free school meals and the early years pupil premium of £7,400. That is equivalent, depending on a family's exact circumstances, to an income of £18,000 to £24,000, once benefits are taken into account. We will publish our response to the consultation shortly. I will briefly set out our thinking on the proposals in more detail.

**Alex Cunningham:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** Let me just set out the thinking, and then I will address some of the issues that colleagues raised.

First, to ensure our proposals do not result in any child losing out on a hot meal from one day to the next as a result of these changes, we propose to offer generous protections. We propose to protect the status of every child currently eligible for free school meals at the point at which the threshold is introduced, and every child who gains eligibility under the new arrangements during the roll-out of universal credit until the end of the roll-out. Following that period, we will protect all pupils who were protected and are still of school age until the end of their phase of education—for example, primary or secondary school.

Those protections will apply to those on universal credit and the legacy benefits that qualify a family for free school meals. We are not proposing to make any changes for those eligible for free school meals because

they are in receipt of asylum support or pensions credits. Those households will therefore remain entitled to free school meals for as long as they retain those benefits.

**Alex Cunningham:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** Let me make some progress. I want to share a lot of information with colleagues.

The proposals will not affect the criteria for universal infant free school meals, which will continue to be available to all pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2, regardless of income. I am sure the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West supports and agrees with that proposal.

Once roll-out of universal credit is complete, we will move to an earnings-based system, similar to the one introduced in Scotland. Any household earning below that earnings threshold and claiming universal credit will be entitled to claim free school meals for their children. We estimate that, as a result of the threshold, by 2022 about 50,000 more—not fewer—children will benefit from a free school meal, compared with the previous benefits system. That means we will be targeting our support more effectively towards low-income families and the most disadvantaged children.

It is only right that we set a threshold and do not allow every family on universal credit to be eligible. Let me explain why. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) said, some families can earn more than £40,000 a year and still receive a small amount of universal credit. I think that is a good thing, because it ensures that they are incentivised to continue to work. Although it is right that those families receive some universal credit, free school meals should continue, in my and many people's opinion, to be targeted at the most disadvantaged families and those on much lower incomes.

**Stephen Timms:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** Let me share this with hon. Members. If we do not set new criteria, the effect would be that about half of all school-age children would be eligible for free school meals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar said, the additional cost would be £600 million for free school meals, or £6.2 billion if we include the pupil premium, which follows that. In contrast, about 14% of children are eligible for free school meals today. That would not be a good deal for the taxpayer, in my opinion, and nor would it be targeting public funding at those in the most need. We have to remember that we want to target money at the frontline of teaching in our schools.

**Stephen Timms:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am just going to address some of the issues colleagues talked about.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Order. The Minister might want to do that, but he has got about a minute left, because Sharon Hodgson has to sum up at the end of the debate.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** Fair enough. I will write to colleagues about the issues I do not address.

The one issue I want to address, because it was picked up by many colleagues, is the cliff edge. First, universal credit removes the major cliff edges in the legacy system, such as 16 hours, so we are moving to a system that is better overall in that respect.

Secondly, the protections we outlined during the roll-out period will ensure that no child loses out on eligibility until after the end of universal credit roll-out. If their parents move over the income threshold, they will continue to be eligible. In the longer term, however, we need to set a threshold to ensure our support is targeted at those who need it most.

Let me pick up the point about the Labour manifesto, which the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) mentioned. The Labour manifesto contained a commitment to free school meals for primary school pupils and said that it will be paid for by a VAT rise on private schools. That is illegal until we leave the European Union. Universal free school meals, which the hon. Gentleman is suggesting now, requires a much bigger number—up to £6.2 billion—so I would like to hear from Labour where that massive increase will come from. It must come from massive tax rises. I think I shall end there, Mr Hollobone.

5.54 pm

**Mrs Hodgson:** I thank the Minister for leaving me time to make some closing remarks.

This has been an excellent debate, although in my opinion it was far too short—it was over-subscribed, which is a good thing, but in the time allocated we obviously had too many speakers. I encourage my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) to seek a Backbench Business debate, as she was unable to set out fully her expert knowledge in this area. Indeed, all my hon. Friends had to curtail their speeches.

I am very happy that the Minister agreed to meet me—as I think he did—

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I did.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Excellent. Will the Minister also extend that invitation to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak, who as he knows is a member of the Work and Pensions Committee? She has considerable expertise in the area.

I again encourage the Minister to read the school food plan—in particular, chapter 11, on the benefits of free school meals. The School Food Plan Alliance would happily meet him and become his new best friends if he wanted to take them up on that.

The cliff edge needs addressing—it is far too low. If there needs to be a cliff edge for all the reasons the Minister set out, it needs to be substantially higher up: £7,400 is too low.

5.56 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*



# Written Statements

Tuesday 6 February 2018

## CABINET OFFICE

### Committee on Standards in Public Life

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):** In July 2017, the Prime Minister asked the independent Committee on Standards in Public Life to undertake a review into the issue of abuse and intimidation experienced by parliamentary candidates, including those who stood in the 2017 general election campaign. Concerns were highlighted by those across the political spectrum. The Committee published a comprehensive report in December.

The Government would like to thank the Committee on Standards in Public Life again for their considered and thorough report. The Prime Minister has today announced some initial measures based on the Committee's findings and the Government will be publishing a substantive response in due course.

As the Prime Minister notes today, in public life, and increasingly in private conversations too, it is becoming harder and harder to conduct any political discussion, on any issue, without it descending into tribalism and rancour. Social media and digital communication—which in themselves can and should be forces for good in our democracy—are being exploited and abused, often anonymously. British democracy has always been robust and oppositional. But a line is crossed when disagreement descends into intimidation.

#### *Individuals standing for elected office*

It cannot be right that people looking to participate in our democracy are subject to abuse and intimidation for doing so. The Government will therefore consult in due course on the introduction of a new offence in electoral law on intimidating candidates and campaigners. We also propose to remove the requirement for candidates for local government to include their home addresses on ballot papers, if they do not wish to do so. This extends the protection already offered to parliamentary candidates.

#### *Online content*

We want users to be better informed about how reported social media content is dealt with. We will establish a new annual internet safety transparency report, to improve our understanding of the offensive content being reported, how social media companies are responding to complaints, and what content is being removed.

The Prime Minister has today called on social media companies to set out how they will respond to the recommendations in the report, and we have been encouraged by the positive response we have seen thus far. It is welcome that social media companies have agreed to take forward the recommendation for a 'pop up' social media reporting team for election campaigns and they will actively provide advice and support to parliamentary candidates.

#### *Political parties*

The report has a number of recommendations for political parties, which they will wish to consider carefully. The Prime Minister has noted that the Conservative

party is putting in place a new code of conduct for members and supporters that puts respect and decency at its core. The Prime Minister is encouraging the leaders of other parties to follow this example.

#### *Law, police and prosecutors*

The Committee made a number of recommendations for national police leadership bodies, including the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing, on devolved operational policing matters. Both the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College will be responding to the Committee's report separately, but we are pleased to confirm that they will implement each of the recommendations in the report that refer to them.

Some of these issues touch on devolved matters, and the UK Government will liaise with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations accordingly.

A more detailed response will be published by the Government in due course. Ministers would welcome further feedback from parliamentary colleagues, and the House may wish to debate and consider these matters further.

I have placed in the Library of the House a copy of the Prime Minister's speech from today.

[HCWS452]

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Sustainability of the Press

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock):** The Prime Minister is today announcing that the Government will be establishing an external review, looking into the sustainability of high-quality journalism, including the national, regional and local press.

Robust high-quality journalism is important for public debate, scrutiny, and ultimately for democratic political discourse. Yet the press currently faces an uncertain future. Print circulations have declined, with readerships moving online, and the shift from print to digital advertising has led to a loss of revenue for the press. The Government are determined to ensure that the UK has a vibrant, independent and plural free press, which is able to provide high-quality journalism as one of the cornerstones of our public debate. As per our manifesto, we are committed to making sure content creators are appropriately rewarded for the content they make available online, and ensure there is a sustainable business model for high-quality media online. The review will help us deliver on these commitments.

We have already commissioned research to look into the current state of the local and national press markets. The review will bring together experts who will be able to assess the many factors affecting the health of the UK's news sector. These factors include the impact of the digital advertising supply chain, the role of content and data in the market, click-bait and the role played by the online platforms.

The review will publish a report and a range of recommendations for the industry and Government to consider. The report is expected to be published later this year.

I have published a summary of the scope of this review on gov.uk. The terms of reference, chair and panel will all be announced in the coming months.

[HCWS454]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Lebanon: Border Assistance

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson):** The United Kingdom is strongly committed to supporting Lebanon's peace, stability and prosperity. Through a long-standing Conflict Stability and Security Fund project worth £22.6 million over three years, the UK is helping the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) secure the Lebanon-Syria border. Our ambition is for Lebanon to have complete authority over its border with Syria.

In order to reach this objective, our Embassy in Beirut wishes to place an order worth £319,916.61 for communications equipment to support the LAF. On 7 September 2017, I made a written statement (HCWS118) in respect of our Embassy in Beirut placing an order of £1.8 million for additional defensive barriers/towers as part of this project. This communications equipment will be used in the new towers to allow secure communications between troops and the headquarters of both the Land Border Regiment and the LAF.

The provision of this assistance is fully in-line with the Government's security and stability objectives in the middle east. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials carry out regular reviews of our programmes in Lebanon to ensure funding is not directed to non-state actors.

[HCWS450]

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Local Government Finance

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** Yesterday, I laid before the House, the "Report on Local Government Finance (England) 2018-19", which represents the annual local government finance settlement for local authorities in England.

I would like to thank all colleagues in the House, council leaders and officers, who contributed to the consultation after the provisional settlement was published before Christmas.

My Ministers and I have engaged extensively with the sector, including offering a teleconference to all local authorities, and holding meetings with representative groups including the Local Government Association and with councils and MPs. Representations from almost 160 organisations or individuals have been carefully considered before finalising the settlement.

This settlement is the third year of a four-year offer which was accepted by 97% of councils in return for publishing efficiency plans. This settlement sees two years of real-terms increases in available resources to local government: £44.3 billion in 2017-18 to £45.6 billion in 2019-20.

The current business rates retention scheme is yielding strong results. Local authorities estimate that in 2017-18 they will keep around £1.3 billion in business rates growth, which we expect will be maintained into 2018-19 and 2019-20. This is on top of the core settlement funding I am announcing today.

I commend local authorities for their work in securing efficiency savings supported by the long-term certainty of the multi-year settlement. Councils continue to seek to maximise public value for every pound invested in public services. Of course, there is further for all councils to go. To help this, I am extending the capital receipts flexibility programme for a further three years. This scheme gives local authorities the freedom to use capital receipts from the sale of their own assets to support transformation and unlock efficiency savings. We will also continue to work with the sector to help them increase transparency and share best practice supporting greater progress in delivering increased efficiency over the coming year. I expect this to have a tangible impact on the steps councils take to promote efficiency by 2019-20.

### *Social Care*

I recognise the need to prioritise spending on social care services that councils provide to our elderly and vulnerable citizens. This is why we announced an additional £2 billion at spring Budget 2017 for adult social care over the three years from 2017-18. This year we have seen how this money has enabled councils to increase provider fees, provide for more care packages and reduce delayed transfer of care.

And, having listening to representations since the provisional settlement, I am today announcing a further £150 million in 2018-19 for an adult social care support grant. This will be taken from anticipated underspend in existing departmental budgets, and will not affect existing revenue commitments made to local government. This will be allocated according to relative needs and we will expect to see councils use it to build on their progress so far in supporting sustainable local care markets.

With this, and other measures, the Government have given councils access to £9.4 billion dedicated funding for adult social care over three years.

This is a long-term challenge that requires a sustainable settlement for the future. The publication of a Green Paper this summer setting out our proposals for reform sets us on the path to securing a resilient and sustainable system.

In children's social care too, it is important to understand cost drivers as well as service quality and efficiency in a highly complex and critical service area. The Government have invested £200 million since 2014 in the innovation programme and partners in practice programme, as well as £920 million in the troubled families programme, to help the children's social care sector innovate and re-design service delivery to achieve higher quality, improve family outcomes and secure better value for money.

I also recognise the good work that local authorities do in caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. I have therefore made £19 million available to local authorities in 2017-18 from within existing budgets, including the controlling migration fund, to develop the skills and capacity to be able to support these very vulnerable children.

### *Protecting residents from excessive council tax rises*

Under the Localism Act 2011 and as re-affirmed in the Government's 2017 manifesto, councils can set whatever council tax rates they wish, but they need the direct consent of local people if they wish to impose an excessive rise. This year, that referendum threshold is set

in line with inflation at 3%. In addition, local authorities with responsibility for social care may levy a precept to spend exclusively on adult social care. As announced last year, this precept equates to up to 6% over three years, from 2017-18 to 2019-20, with a maximum increase of 3% in the first two years and 2% in the final year. This settlement strikes a balance on council tax between the need to relieve pressure on local services, including social care, while also recognising that many households face their own pressures.

#### *New homes bonus*

Local authorities are instrumental in ensuring the building of homes this country needs. By the end of 2018-19, we will have allocated £7 billion in new homes bonus payments to reward the building of 1,400,000 homes since the scheme was introduced in 2011. We recognise the need for continuity and certainty on the new homes bonus, and therefore for the year ahead there will be no new changes to the way the new homes bonus works. The new homes bonus baseline will be maintained at 0.4% and £947.5 million in new homes bonus payments will be paid in 2018-19.

#### *Rural funding*

I am committed to ensuring the needs of rural areas are met and recognise the particular costs of providing services in sparse rural areas. So in 2018-19, in response to representations made since the provisional settlement, I will increase the rural services delivery grant by £31 million—£16 million more than proposed in the provisional settlement. This will take the total to £81 million, a little over the 2016-17 level and the highest it has ever been.

#### *2019-20 and later years*

To meet the challenges of the future we need an updated and more responsive distribution methodology. We have published a formal consultation on a review of relative needs and resources and aim to implement its findings in 2020-21. There have been widespread calls for a thorough, evidence-based review, and we will deliver this. The review will examine the cost of delivering services across the country, including rural areas, and will consider which factors should be taken into account when considering a local authority's relative resources.

Following the delay to the implementation of 100% business rates retention and reforms to the local government finance system, I acknowledge concerns around "negative RSG". We will be looking at fair and affordable options that will address the problem of negative RSG that occurs in 2019-20, and will formally consult on proposals ahead of next year's settlement.

We will also work towards implementing the next phase of our business rates retention reforms in 2020-21 to support the long held objective for local authorities of greater self-sufficiency and financial sustainability. This will give local councils the levers and incentives they need to grow their local economies. Local authorities will be able to keep more business rates, to the value of the revenue support grant, the Greater London Authority transport grant, the rural services delivery grant and the public health grant. Overall, this is equivalent to

75% retention at 2019-20 levels. Local authorities will then be able to keep the equivalent share of business rates growth on their baseline levels from 2020-21, when the system is reset. The Government intend to use the intervening period to develop a set of measures that support a smooth transition of funding for public health services from a grant to retained business rates.

Ahead of this, we will continue to test out aspects of the future business rates retention system in a broad range of authorities right across the country. And, to help us take forward our continued long-term plan to let local government keep 100% of its business rates, in 2018-19 we will continue to pilot 100% business rates retention in Greater Manchester, Liverpool city region, the west midlands, west of England and Cornwall, introduce a London pilot, and will take forward 10 further 100% business rates retention pilots. These are Berkshire, Derbyshire, Devon, Gloucestershire, Kent and Medway, Leeds city region, Lincolnshire, Solent authorities, Suffolk and Surrey. The 10 pilot areas will cover 89 local authorities in total.

I recognise that there is disappointment among those areas that were unsuccessful in their pilot applications this year and I am pleased to confirm that I intend to open a further bidding round for pilots in 2019-20. Further information on this will be published in due course.

#### *Conclusion*

Local government delivers vital services at the heart of the communities they serve. This settlement strikes a balance between relieving growing pressure on local government while ensuring that hard-pressed taxpayers do not face excessive bills. We have listened to representations made and delivered on these requests: two years of real-terms increases in resources, more freedom and fairness, and greater certainty to plan and secure value for money.

[HCWS451]

## PRIME MINISTER

### Clarification

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** During Prime Minister's Questions on 24 January I understand that the monthly 12 hour figures I used, while accurate and drawn directly from data published by the relevant NHS authorities in England and Wales, are not directly comparable (*Official Report* vol. 635, column 256).

I should have used the latest annual data which shows that 3.4% patients waited over 12 hours in Wales last year, compared to 1.3% in England, and the latest monthly data on A&E performance which shows that 85.1% of patients in England were seen within four hours in December 2017 compared to 78.9% in Wales.

[HCWS453]



# Ministerial Correction

*Tuesday 6 February 2018*

## LEADER OF THE HOUSE

### Business of the House

*The following is an extract from questions on the Business of the House to the Leader of the House on 1 February 2018.*

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Rent-to-own companies such as BrightHouse charge eye-watering interest rates for essential goods. The Financial Conduct Authority has just revealed that the average debt for rent-to-own customers has doubled. May we therefore have a statement and real action from the Government and FCA to keep this sector in check?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very concerning point about the debts people get into by using these high-cost lenders to facilitate the purchase

of essential white goods, furniture and so on. I know from my time as City Minister that the FCA takes this incredibly seriously. It has capped the interest rates that such companies are allowed to charge, and it is doing further work to ensure that we protect consumers from the practices of some of those companies.

*[Official Report, 1 February 2018, Vol. 635, c. 1002.]*

*Letter of correction from Andrea Leadsom.*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) during questions on the Business of the House.

The correct response should have been:

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very concerning point about the debts people get into by using these high-cost lenders to facilitate the purchase of essential white goods, furniture and so on. I know from my time as City Minister that the FCA takes this incredibly seriously. **It has capped the interest rates that such payday lending companies are allowed to charge and it is doing further work to ensure we protect consumers from the poor practices of some of those rent-to-own companies.**



# ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 6 February 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE</b> .....	1331	<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—continued</b>	
Children and Young People: Mental Health .....	1337	National Food Crime Unit.....	1343
Children's Health .....	1340	NHS Trusts: VAT Status .....	1342
GP Services.....	1346	Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Trust.....	1332
Grenfell Tower: Mental Health .....	1331	Pharmacy Services .....	1345
Health and Social Care Services.....	1333	Routes into Nursing.....	1335
Hospitals in Special Measures.....	1344	Topical Questions .....	1347
Maternity Transformation Programme .....	1342		

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 6 February 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>CABINET OFFICE</b> .....	41WS	<b>FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE</b> .....	43WS
Committee on Standards in Public Life .....	41WS	Lebanon: Border Assistance .....	43WS
<b>COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b> ..	43WS		
Local Government Finance .....	43WS		
<b>DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT</b> .....	42WS	<b>PRIME MINISTER</b> .....	46WS
Sustainability of the Press.....	42WS	Clarification .....	46WS

# MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Tuesday 6 February 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>LEADER OF THE HOUSE</b> .....	5MC
Business of the House .....	5MC

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than  
Tuesday 13 February 2018**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE  
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

---

CONTENTS

Tuesday 6 February 2018

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1331] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

**Public Service Delivery: Northamptonshire [Col. 1357]**

*Answer to urgent question—(Rishi Sunak)*

**Women's Suffrage Centenary [Col. 1365]**

*Statement—(Amber Rudd)*

**Domestic Properties (Minimum Energy Performance) [Col. 1390]**

*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Sir David Amess)—agreed to  
Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Space Industry Bill [Lords] [Col. 1393]**

*Programme motion (No. 2)—(Joseph Johnson)—agreed to  
As amended, considered; read the Third time and passed*

**Backbench Business**

**Housing, Planning and the Green Belt [Col. 1416]**

*Motion—(Mr Robertson)—agreed to*

**Petitions [Col. 1463]**

**Autism: Educational Outcomes [Col. 1465]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Westminster Hall**

**Statutory PHSE Education [Col. 467WH]**

**International Disaster Relief [Col. 493WH]**

**Train Services: Telford and Birmingham [Col. 519WH]**

**Free School Meals/Pupil Premium: Eligibility [Col. 527WH]**

*General Debates*

**Written Statements [Col. 41WS]**

**Ministerial Correction [Col. 5MC]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

---