

**Wednesday  
7 March 2018**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 7 March 2018**

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# House of Commons

Wednesday 7 March 2018

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### SCOTLAND

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Brexit: Devolution**

1. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What discussions he has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) the Scottish Government on the devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament upon the UK leaving the EU. [904136]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** The Government have intensified their discussions with the Scottish and Welsh Governments on both the significant increase in powers that we expect to see for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly and some common UK frameworks following the UK's EU exit. We are making good progress in those discussions and will meet again tomorrow for the next Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations, at which I hope further progress can be made.

**Chris Elmore:** The Secretary of State and fellow Scottish Conservatives say that clause 11 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is deficient. He gave an undertaking to this House that he would table amendments, which he failed to do. He now says that he will deliver amendments in the other place, which he still has not done. Will he set out what happens if he runs out of time to deliver his much-promised amendments?

**David Mundell:** I am confident that we will be able to bring forward such amendments. We are in significant discussions with the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Government, which both acknowledge that we have tabled to them a significant proposal for changing the Bill. I hope to hear their detailed response to that tomorrow.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is the Government's wish that as powers are returned from Brussels to the UK they will be devolved, not only to Scotland but to Wales and Northern Ireland?

**David Mundell:** Yes, indeed; that is the Government's wish, although we acknowledge that to make the common market within the UK function effectively, some powers and responsibilities will have to be conducted at a UK-wide level.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State set out for the House the mechanism he will use to amend clause 11 of the EU withdrawal Bill, should no agreement be in place by the time the Bill completes its passage in the other place?

**David Mundell:** I do not share the hon. Gentleman's pessimism that there will not be agreement before the Bill completes its passage in the other place. I remain positive about being able to reach an agreement with both the Welsh and Scottish Governments. I believe that they are sincere in their expressed view that they wish to reach such an agreement, and we will take every step to ensure that we negotiate to a position at which we can reach an agreement.

**Ross Thomson** (Aberdeen South) (Con): Leaving the EU means taking back control of our waters, which is a huge opportunity for Scotland's fishermen. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Scottish Government's EU continuity Bill and stated position of remaining in the single market and customs union would simply sell out Scotland's fishermen by handing all those new powers straight back to Brussels?

**David Mundell:** It is incredible that that is indeed the position of the Scottish National party and the Scottish Government. Although at one point SNP Members came to this House and talked about a power grab, they are now willing and want to hand back powers over fishing to the EU right away and to go back into the common fisheries policy.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State explain why, if he believes that Brexit is going to have a profound effect on the devolution settlement, he was excluded from the recent meeting of his Cabinet colleagues at Chequers to formulate the UK's Brexit strategy?

**David Mundell:** I know that the hon. Gentleman does not recognise the result of the 2014 referendum and therefore that the UK Government Cabinet is a Cabinet for the whole United Kingdom, as are all its sub-committees. The decisions on the Prime Minister's approach to the EU negotiations were agreed by the whole Cabinet.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Lesley Laird.

**Tommy Sheppard** *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Was the hon. Gentleman planning to come in again? He has had one question.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I thought I had two.

**Mr Speaker:** There was no indication that the hon. Gentleman was seeking two. In an hour-long session, yes, but not otherwise. I do not know why the hon. Gentleman's brow is furrowed; he has got what was his entitlement and has nothing about which to complain, so he can sit down and we are most grateful to him for doing so.

**Lesley Laird** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): The Secretary of State stood at the Dispatch Box and promised the House that the devolution settlement would

be protected. Three months on, we are facing a constitutional crisis. What exactly is the Secretary of State doing to fix the mess he has made of the EU withdrawal Bill?

**David Mundell:** I will not take any lessons from the hon. Lady whose party was quite prepared to play the SNP game in the Scottish Parliament and vote for a piece of legislation that was quite clearly ruled as not competent by the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament.

**Mr Speaker:** Good communication is very important in these matters. My office was notified of the intention of the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) to ask a question, which he has asked. If he wants to ask a second, so be it, but he should not be flailing and gesticulating as though he has been the subject of some sort of adverse treatment, because he has not. If he wants to get up and blurt out a second question, he is most welcome to do so. Let's hear from the fellow. Come on!

**Tommy Sheppard:** Thank you, Mr Speaker—I did want to ask the Secretary of State a second question. He has previously said that the most important thing about changes to the withdrawal Bill is that they should command the support of all sides. May I ask him: is that still his policy, and does he believe that any framework arrangements should require the consent of the Scottish Parliament if it changes its operations?

**David Mundell:** I have set out clearly that, in the process of leaving the EU, I want to ensure that the Scottish Parliament has more powers and responsibilities than it does today. I also want to ensure that we have an arrangement in place to allow us to agree frameworks as we move forward, and that frameworks, as I have previously said, should not be imposed.

**Mr Speaker:** These exchanges are far too slow. We need short questions and short answers. I want to make progress. Lesley Laird, a couple of brief inquiries, please.

**Lesley Laird:** My party is the party of devolution, and we will continue to protect that. We are 20 months on from the EU referendum, and a year away from leaving the EU, and yet Scotland's invisible man in the Cabinet cannot even blag himself an invite to the awayday at Chequers to discuss Brexit. Does the Secretary of State have a plan to fix this mess, or will he continue to front up a Government who are trampling all over the devolution settlement for Scotland?

**David Mundell:** The Scottish Labour party will be judged on its actions, and I do not see it standing up for the devolution settlement in the Scottish Parliament. Instead, I see it kowtowing to the SNP. In relation to devolution and commitment to the United Kingdom, the hon. Lady, above all people, should know that we have a United Kingdom Cabinet, a United Kingdom Chancellor, and a United Kingdom Prime Minister. Again, she should not kowtow to SNP arguments about separatism—

**Mr Speaker:** We are most grateful. I call Tonia Antoniazzi.

## RBS Branch Closures

2. **Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Royal Bank of Scotland on the potential effect on local communities of the proposed closure of its branches in Scotland. [904137]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** I have met senior RBS management in Scotland to discuss the decision. I made it clear that its plans were disappointing for customers and communities across Scotland, and I urged it to mitigate the impact of closures as comprehensively as possible.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** Small businesses have already reported in Wales and across the United Kingdom that they are being refused if they try to pay in large sums of cash at the post office, as it presents a security risk and post office workers do not have the time to count such large sums of money. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that there is no disruption to small businesses or the public as a result of these ill-thought-out closures?

**David Mundell:** I certainly share the hon. Lady's view that these are ill-thought-out closures, and I am very happy to take the specific point forward. I am sure that colleagues who serve on the Scottish Affairs Committee will also be prepared to put that view to the chief executive of the Royal Bank, who, I am pleased to say, has finally agreed to appear before that Committee.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): The big issue for many rural communities, such as those in my constituency in the borders, will be the access to cash given that RBS is shutting so many branches on the back of previous bank closures. Can the Government do more to ensure that rural communities are getting access to the cash to support the local economies?

**David Mundell:** My hon. Friend raises a very good point. I would be very happy to meet him to discuss that issue further.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The decline in the centres of our Scottish towns is there to be seen. The closure of the branch of the Royal Bank will be a further nail in the coffin. What proposals does the Secretary of State have to try to arrest the decline of our vital little towns in Scotland?

**David Mundell:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very pertinent point; the vast majority of these proposed closures, for example, are related to rural communities. We must focus on ensuring that people in rural areas can continue to receive services. There is the issue of cash, which my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) has just raised, and also things such as broadband, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we want the Scottish Government to roll out more quickly.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It has been the custom since 2015 that the SNP lead spokesperson gets two questions at Scottish questions.

The Scottish Secretary is obviously very much aware of the Scottish Affairs Committee's ongoing inquiry into RBS closures. CEO Ross McEwan has now agreed to appear before the Committee. Bizarrely, the only people who will not go in front of the Committee are UK Government Treasury Ministers, even though they have a 70% share in our interest in that bank. Can he therefore join me in—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Let me say to the hon. Gentleman that I need no advice on procedure from him or any of his colleagues. I work on the basis of that of which the office has been notified—one question, and that was why I granted it. I am well familiar with the precedents; I know what I am doing, but I do require effective communication, which was lacking in this case. It is not appropriate for the hon. Gentleman to use his position to try to score some procedural point, which he has spectacularly failed to do.

**David Mundell:** My Treasury colleagues will have heard the hon. Gentleman's comments.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): On 6 February, RBS announced that it would give 10 branches in Scotland a stay of execution, on the basis that they were the last bank in town. However, one branch, in the Secretary of State's constituency, was given a special reprieve but was not the last bank in town. Why should the Secretary of State's constituents be given preferential treatment while the last banks in some of the poorest communities across Scotland are closed down?

**David Mundell:** I know that this is a hostage to fortune, but I would like the hon. Gentleman to name that branch, because the three branches in my constituency that were to be the subject of this so-called reprieve—which I agree with him is just a stay of execution—are all the last bank in town. I think he should do his research a little better.

### Referendum on Independence

3. **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on holding a further independence referendum. [904138]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** Scotland held a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014—a “once in a generation” event, we were told—and the result was decisive. Now is not the time for a second independence referendum. Our entire focus should be on pulling together during negotiations with the European Union, making sure we get the best deal for the whole of the UK.

**David T. C. Davies:** I entirely agree, but if by some chance the Scottish Government do manage to have another referendum, on leaving the single market and the customs union which they share with the rest of the United Kingdom, will my right hon. Friend show it more respect than they are currently showing to the 17.6 million people across the UK who voted for Brexit?

**David Mundell:** Not surprisingly, I agree with my hon. Friend. He will be particularly aware that 1 million people in Scotland—most of them SNP voters—who voted to leave the EU have been airbrushed out of

history; they do not exist. If one listens to the our First Minister, apparently everybody in Scotland voted to remain in the EU.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We must focus on the independence referendum, not on the European Union.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State not think that, once we have clarity on what Brexit will really mean for the people of Scotland, it is right for them to decide their future, and that it is not for Westminster politicians to stop people making a decision?

**David Mundell:** We had an independence referendum in 2014. The outcome was decisive. We were told ahead of that referendum that it was to be a “once in a generation”—indeed, once in a lifetime—event, and that is what it should be.

### City Deals

4. **Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): What progress the Government have made on their deal for every city in Scotland. [904139]

7. **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What progress the Government have made on their plans to deliver a city deal for every city in Scotland. [904142]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** The UK Government are either negotiating or implementing a city region deal for all of Scotland's seven great cities and the regions around them. So far we have committed over £1 billion to this landmark programme, and there is more to come. We are currently negotiating with local partners for both the Stirling and Clackmannanshire and Tay cities deals, and we hope to conclude the heads of agreements in the coming months.

**Paul Masterton:** The Secretary of State will be aware that a number of the projects associated with the Glasgow region city deal, including two taking place in East Renfrewshire, are over budget and behind schedule. Does he agree that it is vital that we get to work on these projects as soon as possible, so that local communities can benefit?

**David Mundell:** I do agree with my hon. Friend about raising those issues with the Glasgow city deal. It is not enough just to sign these deals and to promote them; what we need is delivery, and I will look at the specific issues he has raised.

**Luke Graham:** Will my right hon. Friend help to break the deadlock with the devolved Administration and commit to the amount of money that Westminster is willing to put forward in the Stirling and Clackmannanshire deal, so that Clackmannanshire can realise its true ambition?

**David Mundell:** My hon. Friend has certainly been a strong advocate for Clackmannanshire in this process. I hope to meet the Scottish Government shortly to discuss both this deal and the Tay cities deal, in the hope that the Scottish Government and the UK Government can go forward with local partners in a collaborative way.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State share my frustration at the lack of progress on the Ayrshire growth deal? Does he agree that it is time to get on and kick-start the deal for all the people of Ayrshire?

**David Mundell:** Yes I do.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Further to that question, will the Secretary of State give us a timeline for when the UK Government will agree the Ayrshire growth deal?

**David Mundell:** The hon. Gentleman's constant flow of negativity is in marked contrast to the three local authorities that I met recently in Ayrshire, which are very keen to work with the Scottish Government and the UK Government to make the Ayrshire growth deal a reality.

### Leaving the EU

5. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [904140]

10. **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [904146]

13. **Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [904149]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** As Members would expect, I have very regular discussions with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet regarding UK Government policy and how it affects Scotland. The UK Government are committed to securing a deal that works for all parts of the UK, including Scotland.

**Hannah Bardell:** Has the Secretary of State just given up on getting the consent of the Scottish Parliament for any changes to its powers on the devolved settlement that this Tory Government plan to make, or is he so out of the loop that he no longer gets invited to Cabinet meetings and has quite simply become an irrelevance?

**David Mundell:** I do not know who briefs the hon. Lady, but the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations is meeting tomorrow. We are meeting with Mike Russell and Mark Drakeford, and we hope to take forward the solid progress that we have achieved over the course of these meetings.

**Stephen Gethins:** One area where the Scottish and UK Governments appear to agree is that plans to take us out of the single market will be devastating for Scotland's GDP, so can he tell us what plans he has to protect public services in Scotland from that?

**David Mundell:** The hon. Gentleman usually takes his brief with great seriousness, and therefore I am sure that he will have read the Prime Minister's speech, if not watched it last week, which set out how the UK Government will approach the negotiations.

**Mhairi Black:** We have seen the Secretary of State go back on his words about the single market and have his authority undermined by not being invited to the PM's Brexit meeting, and we are still waiting for his amendments to the withdrawal Bill. Given that the deadline is next Thursday, will this be just another catalogue of failures for the Secretary of State?

**David Mundell:** I would be very pleased if, after tomorrow's meeting of the JMCEN, we are able to bring forward an agreed amendment that can be tabled in the House of Lords. That is certainly the aspiration of the UK Government.

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Last week, the Prime Minister met me and colleagues from our fishing constituencies around the UK, including Scotland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the meeting highlighted how this Government are serious about realising the opportunity presented by Brexit, and reminded us that only this Government will take us out of the common fisheries policy?

**David Mundell:** Absolutely. Since his election to this place last year, my hon. Friend has been a powerful advocate for the fishing industry and the expressed wish of the fishing industry to leave the common fisheries policy, and that is what this Government will deliver for the fishing industry in Scotland.

11. [904147] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): My right hon. Friend is no doubt aware of the enormous benefits that Brexit potentially provides for the Scottish economy, as part of one United Kingdom, but does he also agree with Corby Scots—Scots in my constituency—that the talk of an unwanted second independence referendum far outweighs any risk that Brexit might present?

**David Mundell:** I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that talk of a second independence referendum is unwelcome and unnecessary. We have reached the point in the negotiations where we all need to come together and work with the Prime Minister to get the best possible deal for Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What progress is being made on ensuring that Scotland's food producers will still have the protection that they need for important geographic brands such as Orkney beef or Shetland lamb after we have left the European Union?

**David Mundell:** I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that, despite scare stories to the contrary that have appeared in some parts of the media, there will be no change to the protection of those brands or an allowing in of false brands purporting to be them.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): Non-UK nationals are essential to the agricultural industry in East Lothian. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that they will still have the same access after we leave the EU?

**David Mundell:** I very much welcomed the debate in this Parliament on that issue, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) who has been a strong advocate of the need for seasonal workers in

Scotland, particularly in the soft fruit industry. The points raised in that debate and in the meetings of the Scottish Affairs Committee have all been recognised by the Government and will be looked at as we move forward.

#### **Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal**

**6. Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal. [904141]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** My colleague the noble Lord Duncan met with partners recently at the Forth Valley College, and I have met Cabinet Secretary Keith Brown to discuss the Scottish contribution to the deal. I hope to meet Mr Brown again shortly.

**Stephen Kerr:** It sometimes feels that the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city deal is taking longer to deliver than a baby elephant at Blair Drummond safari park. When does the Secretary of State expect to sign a heads of agreement with the Scottish Government and the local authorities? What discussions has he had with the Secretary of State for Defence on the future use of the Ministry of Defence site at Forthside in the city deal? [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I want to hear the answer, to hear whether the Secretary of State is widening it beyond Stirling and Clackmannanshire or not.

**David Mundell:** We hope to sign that deal soon. The Ministry of Defence intends to dispose of Forthside by 2020, under the better defence estate strategy. We are working with the MOD to look at how the site can be part of that city deal.

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I will give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt, but he must not shoehorn his own constituency into the matter. Let's hear it.

**Stewart Hosie:** The Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal does indeed include the transfer of MOD land at Forthside, and the decontamination of that land, to Stirling Council. I understand that that is no longer going to happen. Can the Secretary of State tell us whether it will happen and when will it happen, or is it yet another broken Tory promise?

**David Mundell:** How disappointing to allow that negative note into proceedings on city deals. City deals have worked because they have been a positive collaboration between the UK Government, Scottish Government, local authorities and partners, and it is exactly that sort of negativity and politicking that undermines the whole process.

**Mr Speaker:** It may be negative, but at least it was definitely orderly.

#### **Scottish Economy**

**8. Ged Killen** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): What recent assessment he has made of the strength of the Scottish economy. [904144]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew):** The latest official figures show that the Scottish economy is growing, but at a slower pace than we would like and continuing to lag behind the UK. The UK Government are delivering for Scotland, including with our UK-wide industrial strategy, and of course with £2 billion of extra spending for Scotland, but the Scottish Government hold many of the levers that could drive growth, and they should be using those to make sure Scotland becomes a competitive place to do business. [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I understand the sense of anticipation in the House, but we are discussing the strength of the Scottish economy, in which colleagues should take a polite and respectful interest.

**Ged Killen:** The Secretary of State will be aware of the proposed closure of the 2 Sisters chicken plant in my constituency, with 450 jobs at risk. Will he join me in calling on the Scottish Government to set up a taskforce to look at viable alternatives? Will he agree to meet me to set out any help the UK Government might be able to offer?

**Stuart Andrew:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question, and yes, absolutely; the Secretary of State and I were talking about this this morning. He is more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman, and will raise the issue with the Scottish Government on his behalf.

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): The success of the economy of the south of Scotland is clearly linked to that of the economy of the north of England, particularly my constituency of Carlisle. Does the Minister agree that the borderlands initiative is an exciting opportunity for both sides of the border to boost economic growth?

**Stuart Andrew:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. We are of course bringing about growth deals all over the country, and we also need to look at those areas where we can have them across borders, so we completely welcome the project he talks about.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the hon. Gentleman's namesake, Stuart C. McDonald.

14. [904150] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me to discuss the potentially disastrous consequences for workers in and the community of Cumbernauld if the proposed closure of the tax office there is allowed to proceed?

**Stuart Andrew:** Yes.

**Mr Speaker:** Finally, I call Toby Perkins.

#### **ATP Tennis Tournament**

**9. Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): If he will make it his policy to work with the Scottish Government and the Lawn Tennis Association on hosting an ATP World Tour tennis tournament in Scotland. [904145]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew):** We know your interest in tennis, Mr Speaker. The success of Andy Murray in the singles,

Jamie Murray in the doubles and Gordon Reid in the wheelchair event has undoubtedly increased interest in tennis in Scotland. We would certainly support measures that encourage more people to engage with tennis and, indeed, any sport in Scotland.

**Toby Perkins:** I am very encouraged to hear that. As we look towards the legacy of Andy Murray, the greatest British tennis player ever, it would be great to see the UK Government, the Scottish Government and perhaps even Glasgow City Council working together with the Lawn Tennis Association to make a profitable tennis tournament at ATP elite level.

**Stuart Andrew:** Indeed; Scotland has been a great venue for tennis. The Scottish Government actually lead on this. It would be welcome to hear anything from the Scottish Government, and we would be more than happy to meet them to discuss the situation.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [904221] **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 7 March.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** I would like to begin by updating the House on the Government's response to the incident that occurred in Salisbury on Sunday. I pay tribute to the work of all the emergency services who responded at the scene, and those who are now caring for the two critically ill individuals in hospital. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House yesterday, the police investigation is ongoing. Yesterday afternoon, I chaired a meeting of the National Security Council, where we were updated on that investigation, which is now being led by counter-terrorism police. This morning, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary chaired a meeting of the Government's emergency committee, Cobra, and she has asked the police to provide an update later today.

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

**Simon Hoare:** Representing a south-west constituency, may I align my remarks with those of my right hon. Friend? The incident in Salisbury has clearly caused great concern across the south-west and, of course, the country.

North Dorset's councils and I share the Prime Minister's commitment to delivering new housing, such as the 1,800 new homes proposed for Gillingham in my constituency. We understand how housing transforms lives and supports local economic growth. May I welcome this week's announcement from the Prime Minister? Let us get Britain building and deliver those quality homes of all tenures that our constituents now need.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of housing. Earlier this week, I confirmed that the Government are rewriting the rules on planning to help restore the dream of home ownership. We want to see planning permissions going to people who are actually going to build houses, not

just sit on land and watch its value rise. Our new rules will also make sure that the right infrastructure is in place to support housing developments, and planning changes will also allow more affordable homes to be prioritised for key workers. The Government have made it a priority to build the homes people need so that everyone can afford a safe and decent place to live.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for the short statement she made concerning the incident in Salisbury. I think we all thank the emergency and security services for their response, and we await updates on the progress of investigations into the cause of that incident.

Tomorrow is International Women's Day—a chance both to celebrate how far we have come on equality for women but also to reflect on how far we have to go, not just in this country but around the world.

Later today, the Prime Minister is due to meet Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the ruler of Saudi Arabia. Despite much talk of reform, there has been a sharp increase in the arrest and detention of dissidents, torture of prisoners is common, human rights defenders are routinely sentenced to lengthy prison terms, and unfair trials and executions are widespread, as Amnesty International confirms. As she makes her arms sales pitch, will she also call on the Crown Prince to halt the shocking abuse of human rights in Saudi Arabia?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for telling me that it is International Women's Day tomorrow. I think that is what is called mansplaining.

I look forward to welcoming Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman from Saudi Arabia to this—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shame on you!"] Labour Back Benchers are shouting "Shame" from a sedentary position. I say to those Back Benchers that the link we have with Saudi Arabia is historic and important, and has potentially saved the lives of hundreds of people in this country. The fact that it is an important link is not just a view that I hold. The shadow Foreign Secretary said this morning:

"Our relationship with Saudi Arabia is an important one".

She went on to say:

"that doesn't mean that we should be pulling our punches."

I agree, which is why I will be raising concerns about human rights with the Crown Prince when I meet him.

As the right hon. Gentleman started on the issue of International Women's Day, I welcome the fact that the Crown Prince will be sitting down with, as the guest of, a female Prime Minister.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** A year on, the Government are still suppressing a report on the funding of extremism, which allegedly found evidence of Saudi funding going to terrorist groups here in the UK, thus threatening our security. When will that report come out?

A humanitarian disaster is now taking place in Yemen. Millions face starvation and 600,000 children have cholera because of the Saudi-led bombing campaign and the blockade—600,000 children with cholera is something that everyone in this House should take seriously. Germany has suspended arms sales to Saudi Arabia, but British arms sales have increased sharply and British military advisers are directing the war. It cannot be right that the right hon. Lady's Government are colluding in what

the United Nations says is evidence of war crimes. Will the Prime Minister use her meeting with the Crown Prince today to halt the arms supplies and demand an immediate ceasefire in Yemen?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman raised two questions. On the first point about the Home Office's internal review, the Government are committed to stamping out extremism in all its forms. When I was Home Secretary, I launched the counter-extremism strategy. My right hon. Friend the current Home Secretary has appointed our counter-extremism commissioner. The review gave us the best picture of how extremists operating in the UK sustain their activities and improved our understanding of that. Its most important finding was that, contrary to popular perception, Islamist extremists draw most of their financial support from domestic, rather than overseas, sources.

I understand that because of some of the personal content in the report, it has not been published. However, Privy Counsellors have been invited to go to the Home Office to read the report. That invitation was extended, I believe, to the shadow Home Secretary, so she and other Privy Council colleagues on the Labour Front Bench are free to go and read the report.

The second issue that the right hon. Gentleman raised was the humanitarian situation in Yemen. We are all concerned about the appalling humanitarian situation in Yemen and the effect that it is having on people, particularly women and children. That is why the Government have increased our funding for Yemen. For 2017-18, we increased it to over £200 million. We are the third largest humanitarian donor to Yemen. We are delivering life-saving aid that will provide nutrition support for 1.7 million people and clean water for 1.2 million people.

I was pleased that when I went to Saudi Arabia in December I met the Crown Prince, and raised with him the need to open the port of Hodeidah to humanitarian and commercial supplies. I am pleased to say that Saudi Arabia then did just that. This vindicates the engagement that we have with Saudi Arabia and the ability to sit down with them. Their involvement in Yemen came at the request of the legitimate Government of Yemen. It is backed by the United Nations Security Council, and as such we support it. On the humanitarian issue, it is for all parties in the conflict to ensure that they allow humanitarian aid to get through to those who need it.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Of course we all want all possible humanitarian aid to go to Yemen to help the people who are suffering, but I refer the right hon. Lady to the remarks made by the former International Development Secretary, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who said:

"we must not be afraid to condemn the nightly attacks on Yemen by the Saudi air force that have killed and maimed innocent men, women and children."

There has to be an urgent ceasefire to save lives in Yemen.

Why does the Prime Minister think that rough sleeping fell under Labour but has doubled under the Conservatives?

**The Prime Minister:** To respond to the first question raised by the right hon. Gentleman on the conflict taking place in Yemen, we have encouraged the Saudi Arabia Government to ensure that when there are allegations of activity taking place that is not in line with

international humanitarian law, they investigate them and learn the lessons. I believe something like 55 reports have already been published as a result of that.

On arms exports to Saudi Arabia, the right hon. Gentleman seems to be at odds with his shadow Foreign Secretary once again. This morning she said the arms industry is not something she is seeking to undermine, as long as it is within international law. She went on to say that she thought the UK can sell arms to any country as long as they are used within the law. We agree. This country has a very tight arms export regime, and when there are allegations of arms not being used within the law we expect that to be investigated and lessons to be learned.

On rough sleeping, nobody in this House wants to see anybody having to sleep rough on the streets. That is why this Government are putting in millions of pounds extra to deal with rough sleeping. It is why we are piloting the Housing First approach in three of our major cities. We want to ensure not just that we deal with the situation when somebody is found sleeping rough, but that we prevent people from sleeping rough in the first place.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** In November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a rough sleeping taskforce and £28 million for three pilot schemes to tackle homelessness. I understand that, four months on, the taskforce has not yet met and not a penny has been spent on that programme. There is a homelessness crisis in this country: rough sleeping has doubled since 2010. Does the Prime Minister not think it is a little unambitious to say that we are going to tackle rough sleeping by 2027?

**The Prime Minister:** We are going to eliminate it by 2027—that is our aim. Perhaps it would be helpful, Mr Speaker, if I was to update the right hon. Gentleman. The taskforce he referred to has in fact met. It met today. More importantly—the right hon. Gentleman has asked me this previously—it is not the only group of people we bring together to look at rough sleeping. We have an expert advisory group that has been meeting over recent months, and whose reports, information and expertise are being in-put to that taskforce.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about homelessness. Statutory homelessness is less than half its peak in 2003, but we recognise that there is more to do. That is why we want more homes to be built. On rough sleeping, of course we want people to have a roof over their head, but about half of rough sleepers have a mental health problem. That is why we are putting more money into mental health. That is why it is not just a question of improving figures; it is a question of changing people's lives around. If the right hon. Gentleman really cares, he will look at the complexity of this issue and recognise it is about more than giving people a roof over their head. It is about dealing with the underlying problems that lead to them rough sleeping in the first place.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am glad that the Government showed such urgency in setting up this taskforce that it took four months to have a meeting of it, and it still has not achieved anything. Many people in this country are very upset and very embarrassed about the levels of rough sleeping in this country, and many volunteer. I got a letter this week from Barry:

"I volunteer in my hometown of Southampton to feed the homeless because the lack of care and help for these individuals is a disgrace."

He goes on to point out the number of unoccupied buildings in his town and many others. Does the Prime Minister believe that her Government cutting homelessness services by 45% since 2010 has had some effect on the numbers of people who are rough sleeping?

**The Prime Minister:** If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that the only way issues are solved is by bringing people together at a meeting, I have to tell him that that is not the way to solve issues. The way to deal with these issues is actually to get out there on the ground and do something about it. That is why we are funding 48 projects to help rough sleepers into emergency accommodation and to overcome issues like mental ill health and substance abuse. It is why councils around the country, during the severe weather, have been ensuring that they provide accommodation for people who are sleeping on the streets, but also dealing with the underlying issues that lead to somebody sleeping on the streets. It is why we are ensuring that we are implementing Housing First in a number of regions, to put entrenched rough sleepers into accommodation as a first step to rebuilding their lives.

This is not about figures; it is about people. It is about ensuring that we take the action necessary to deal with the problems that people face that lead to them rough sleeping. It is also about ensuring that we build enough homes in this country for people, and that is why what we are doing to revise the planning laws, to ensure that people build houses when they have planning permission, should be welcomed by the right hon. Gentleman when he stands up.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I do not think any of that would come as much comfort to the rough sleepers I meet, who are begging every day just to find enough money to get into a night shelter. The Conservative chair of the Local Government Association, Lord Porter, warned that

“councils are now beyond the point where council tax”

can plug the gap. That is the result of the Government’s slashing of council budgets and passing on the buck.

After this deathly cold winter, we have more than twice as many people sleeping rough on our streets. Just one step away from that fate are 60,000 homeless households in temporary accommodation. We are the fifth richest country in the world. The growing number of people on our streets is a mark of national shame. With fewer social homes being built, less support for the homeless and a taskforce that has barely met, just how does the Prime Minister propose to tackle the homelessness crisis?

**The Prime Minister:** We propose to deal with homelessness and the issue of people who are not homeless but want to be able to have a home of their own by building more homes in this country. We propose to deal with it, as I said earlier this week, by ensuring that tenants get a fairer deal when they rent in this country. But I have to say that more council houses have been built under this Conservative Government than were built in 13 years under Labour. More social housing has been built in the last seven years than in the last seven years under the Labour Government. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to look at a record in relation to housing, he should look at the record of the last Labour Government.

Of course, the record of the last Labour Government was described as bringing—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Perkins, I know you asked about tennis earlier, but you now appear to be attempting some imitation of crochet. You should not be making these curious gesticulations; they make you look even odder than—they make you look very odd. [*Interruption.*] Well, I thought your behaviour was a tad odd, and I am concerned about your wellbeing. I think the hon. Members for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) will look after you.

**The Prime Minister:** The record of the last Labour Government on housing was described as a crisis, bringing misery and despair. Who said the last Labour Government’s record was bringing misery and despair? It was the Leader of the Opposition. The right hon. Gentleman said that Labour did not have a good record on housing, and I agree. It is the Conservatives who are delivering the homes the country needs.

**Q2.** [904222] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Over the last three years, more than 2,000 new homes have been built in North West Leicestershire, including a record 731 in the last 12 months. Additionally, my local authority is building new council houses for the first time in decades. That is all in contrast with the 227 houses completed in the year to 2010, which was the last time Labour was in government. Will my right hon. Friend use North West Leicestershire as an example to other local authorities and show them our unemployment rate of 1% and the fact that we have no rough sleepers?

**The Prime Minister:** I am pleased that my hon. Friend has raised the example of North West Leicestershire, and we are very happy to join him in acknowledging the example it is setting. Of course, the figures he quoted contributed to the 217,000 new homes built across the country last year, which was the best year bar one in the last 30 years in terms of the number of new homes, but there is more to do. That is why we have rewritten the planning rules and had measures in the Budget to make money available and help people on to the housing ladder through the Help to Buy scheme. Once again, as he mentioned, it is the Conservatives in government who are delivering the homes that people need.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On 6 February, the Royal Bank of Scotland announced that 10 branches earmarked for closure were to be given a reprieve, subject to a review at the end of the year. Will the Prime Minister join me in calling on the Royal Bank of Scotland to do what it can to encourage people to open accounts and make sure these branches are sustainable?

**The Prime Minister:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows full well, the opening and closing of branches is a commercial matter for the Royal Bank of Scotland. He asks me to call on people to open accounts and use the branches, but of course one reason bank branches are closing is that more people are choosing not physically to go into them but to bank on the internet. It is up to customers to decide what banking arrangements suit them.

**Ian Blackford:** I remind the Prime Minister that we own the Royal Bank of Scotland and that she ought to be holding the company to account. I had a phone call from a constituent of mine, an Angus Sutherland, who phoned the Royal Bank of Scotland yesterday wanting to open accounts for himself and his family. Rather than opening them in the local branch in Kyle, which is one of those earmarked for reprieve, he was told to approach a branch elsewhere. It is outrageous that the Royal Bank of Scotland is undermining the ability of these branches to stay open. Will she finally call in the chief executive, Ross McEwan, and tell him that this behaviour must end?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman has raised these questions before. I would have thought, given his background, that he would understand that these decisions are taken by commercial organisations and that it is not for the Government to tell people what sort of accounts to have or in which branches to open them. We take steps to ensure that where there are branch closures, other facilities are available; that is why we have the agreement with the Post Office to provide additional ability for people to use services through the Post Office. It is not right for him to suggest, that the Government should be telling people where to have their bank accounts and how to hold them. There are commercial decisions for banks on bank branches, and there are decisions for individual customers on their own banking arrangements.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** I am pleased to say that we are now on to Back-Bench Members. I want to hear lots of them.

Q5. [904225] **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): Thanks to income tax hikes by the Scottish national party Government, thousands of UK armed forces personnel who are stationed in Scotland will pay more tax than their counterparts south of the border. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this Conservative Government are reviewing the steps that they can take to clean up the SNP's mess and mitigate the tax rise for our brave servicemen and women?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. As a result of decisions made by the Scottish nationalists in government in Scotland, many people there will be paying higher taxes. Those earning more than £26,000 will pay higher taxes in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. I was in the Chamber for the end of Defence questions the other day when my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary said that he was looking into the point that my hon. Friend has raised about armed forces personnel in Scotland.

Q3. [904223] **Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Labour lifted a million children out of poverty, and this Government are on course to plunge a record 37% of children into poverty. Vulnerable people are being denied social care because of Government cuts in local authority budgets. Is this really a society that is working for everyone?

**The Prime Minister:** The number of people in absolute poverty has fallen under this Conservative Government. However, we want to ensure that families are helped to support themselves, which is why we have increased the

national living wage, increased the personal allowance and so taken more people out of income tax, and revised the benefits system so that more people are encouraged and able to get into the workplace

Q9. [904229] **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I am sure my right hon. Friend will agree that good air quality will improve the lives of everyone in the country, and the lives of their children and grandchildren. We are launching a Joint Committee on the subject, because cross-Government work between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Health and the Department for Transport is important. Will the Prime Minister appoint a member of the Cabinet to co-ordinate that work to ensure that our children and grandchildren benefit from better air quality?

**The Prime Minister:** This is an important issue. We are committed to being the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited. We are taking action on pollution, and I am pleased that emissions of toxic nitrogen oxides fell by almost 27% between 2010 and 2016, but there is of course more for us to do, which is why we have a £3.5 billion plan to tackle poor air quality and provide cleaner transport. Later this year, we will publish a strategy that will set out further steps.

I assure my hon. Friend that both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whose Department covers energy and air quality issues, and the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, who attends Cabinet, are very well versed in putting together the arguments for better air quality.

Q4. [904224] **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): As the Saudi Crown Prince sweeps across Westminster and Whitehall, will the Prime Minister pledge to raise the specific case of the jailed writer Raif Badawi? He has languished in a prison for six years, all because he wrote some things that his Government did not like. His wife and children have now claimed asylum in Canada. Will the Prime Minister pledge to raise his case, and will she also do something that her predecessor never did? Will she stand at the Dispatch Box and say that Raif Badawi is no criminal, and that he should be set free?

**The Prime Minister:** I will be raising a number of cases with the Crown Prince when I see him over the next couple of days, but we do not wait for a visit from the Crown Prince to raise the case of Raif Badawi. We monitor the situation regularly and raise the issue regularly with the Saudi Government, and we will continue to do so.

Q12. [904232] **Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): Will the Prime Minister support the work that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Oil and Gas Authority are doing to facilitate the production of £1 trillion of oil and gas revenue from the continental shelf, supporting 300,000 jobs? Will she also join me in paying tribute to the men and women who work offshore to ensure that our homes stay warm?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to those who work in our offshore oil and gas industry, and thanking them for the

work that they do. Last week's weather highlighted just how important that work is to us all. We remain committed to supporting the industry, building on the £2.3 billion package announced in recent Budgets. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the oil and gas sector recently committed themselves to working together to ensure that the UK continues to enjoy the benefits of a world-leading offshore oil and gas industry.

Q6. [904226] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Nottingham needs to find an extra £12 million this year to care for elderly and disabled people, but the Government's answer—adding 3% to council tax bills—only raises just over £3 million, leaving a huge gap to be filled. No wonder Lord Porter, Conservative chair of the Local Government Association, warns that some councils will “be pushed perilously close to the financial edge.”

Will the Prime Minister wake up to the social care crisis and urge the Chancellor to give local government the funding it needs in next week's spring statement?

**The Prime Minister:** We have recognised the pressures that social care is under. That is why in successive fiscal events the Chancellor has given extra money to local authorities and the social care sector as a whole. Next week's statement is not a Budget, but we have ensured that more money is going into local councils, not just through the precept that they are able to raise, but £2 billion extra has been put into social care in local authorities.

Q15. [904235] **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): The UK internal market is by far the most important market for British goods and services today and post-Brexit. Does the Prime Minister agree that the people and businesses of my constituency and across Wales are best served by the four nations of the United Kingdom working together constructively and positively to make Brexit a success?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend about the four nations working together to make a success of Brexit, but this Government are also committed to strengthening our precious Union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is about providing continuity and certainty for people and businesses, and it is about making sure we do not create new barriers to doing business in what is, as my hon. Friend said, our most important market: the internal market of the UK.

Q7. [904227] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York's housing crisis is out of control: whole families crammed into tiny box bedrooms; hundreds of damp and mouldy council homes; and street homelessness up fifteenfold since 2010. My constituents do not want warm platitudes from the Prime Minister, they just want warm homes, so when can they have the social housing that they so desperately need and that York's Tory-Lib Dem council has completely failed to deliver, as does the Prime Minister's strategy?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Lady will have heard earlier, the Government are making changes to ensure that we build more homes in this country. But I also say to the hon. Lady that one of the issues we have had to

look at is making sure that local councils are producing local plans. I believe that York has not had a local plan for 50 years; I suggest the hon. Lady speaks to her council about it.

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): On Sunday evening it was not Meryl Streep winning an Oscar but my constituent Maisie Sly, just six years old and born profoundly deaf, after her amazing performance in the film “The Silent Child”. Will the Prime Minister join me in paying tribute to the inspirational Maisie Sly and her school Red Oaks Primary, which has helped her fulfil her true potential?

**The Prime Minister:** I think everybody was captivated by Maisie's example and the film that won the Oscar, and I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Maisie for her incredible achievement. This is important in highlighting the issue of disabled people, particularly deaf children, and it has captured the imagination of so many across the world.

Q8. [904228] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On Friday next week the House will debate the private Member's Bill on refugee family reunification being introduced by the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil). It is a very simple Bill that will allow families torn apart by conflict to rebuild their lives here together. It is supported by a coalition of organisations including the Red Cross, Amnesty International and the Refugee Council. Will the Government add their support to this very important Bill?

**The Prime Minister:** This country has a good record of ensuring we are providing places for refugees and helping the most vulnerable, but I understand that, as the right hon. Gentleman will know, we are listening to the points being made in relation to this Bill; we recognise the concern about family reunification and there are already rules in existence, but we will look carefully at this.

**Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): This week is National Apprenticeship Week and, as a former apprentice, I can highly recommend this route into the workplace. The Government have a great record of delivering more apprenticeships, and higher-level apprenticeships are up 35% on last year. Will the Prime Minister ensure that all schools are promoting apprenticeships, particularly those at degree level, as a first-class, debt-free choice, not a second-class option?

**The Prime Minister:** It is very important that we promote apprenticeships not as a second-class option, but as an equally valid route through training and education for young people. It is about getting the right education for every young person, and we should encourage schools to talk about apprenticeships at an earlier stage. When I visited a school in Southall with my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary to make my announcement about the tertiary education review, the sixth-formers made the point that they had heard about university throughout their schooling, but they only heard about apprenticeships at the very last minute of sixth form. It is important that we open up all opportunities to young people.

Q10. [904230] **Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister explain why there was a 60% drop in apprenticeships last year?

**The Prime Minister:** We have introduced the apprenticeship levy, and we are looking at its application. We have a commitment over a period of years for the number of apprenticeships, and we are going to increase that number to 3 million over this Parliament. We will be doing that, and we will look very carefully at the operation of the apprenticeship levy and its impact.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): On International Women's Day tomorrow, we will be celebrating record numbers of women in work, including of course our second female Prime Minister, yet attitudes towards pregnancy mean that more than 50,000 women a year are forced out of their job just for having a baby. When will the Government be taking forward the review of existing protections for pregnant women that was promised following the Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry into this important issue?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. We have very clear laws in this country that say that discrimination in the workplace is unlawful, and there are clear regulations in place that employers must follow. In our response to the Taylor review, we committed to update the information about pregnancy and maternity discrimination, and we will review the legislation relating to protection against redundancy within the next 12 months.

Q11. [904231] **Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): The Prime Minister continues to sing the praises of universal credit while wilfully ignoring the devastation that it is still causing. How does she square her position with the fact that her Tory colleagues in Stirling Council have called for over half a million pounds-worth of funding in order to mitigate the enormous human suffering caused by universal credit?

**The Prime Minister:** Universal credit was introduced as a simpler benefit that enables and encourages people to get into the workplace. We have made a number of changes to the way in which universal credit is operated, including ensuring that it is now possible for somebody to get a 100% advance on their universal credit in very quick time at the start of their application where that is appropriate. Universal credit is a benefit that helps people get into the workplace, and work is the best route out of poverty.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): Storm Emma left a trail of destruction along the south coast of Devon, including washing away large stretches of the A379 along the Slapton line. Will the Prime Minister please assure my constituents that they will not be left isolated and their communities separated, and will she pledge funds to help rebuild this vital link? Will she also join me in thanking the emergency services, both in my constituency and around the United Kingdom, for their extraordinary work in desperately difficult circumstances?

**The Prime Minister:** I and, I am sure, everyone in the House will be happy to join my hon. Friend in praising the emergency services for the tireless work that they have been doing to help people during the severe winter weather that we have experienced. She is right to raise

concerns about the A379 on the behalf of her constituents, and I am pleased to announce that my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary will shortly confirm that we will provide financial assistance to ensure that repairs to the road are undertaken as quickly as possible.

Q13. [904233] **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Battersea power station is a £9 billion development pushed through by Tory Wandsworth Council with only 9% so-called affordable homes. Eighty-five per cent. of homes in the development have been snapped up by foreign investors, which is an insult to the thousands of people on the Wandsworth housing waiting list. Is the Prime Minister embarrassed that a Tory council is siding with developers' profits over the residents of Wandsworth?

**The Prime Minister:** This is a site that was derelict for 40 years. [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. This is very discourteous. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. The question was heard—it was very forcefully delivered and very fully heard—and the Prime Minister's answer must also be heard.

**The Prime Minister:** This is a site that was derelict for 40 years. It is now a site that will be providing homes and jobs, and I would have thought that is something to welcome.

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): March is Brain Tumour Awareness Month, a month dedicated to supporting people affected by brain tumours and to raising funds and awareness. Brain tumours remain the biggest cancer killer of children and adults under 40, a fact that has to change. There has been great progress over the past month, with the Government turning their attention to this underfunded disease, but so much more can be done. Will the Prime Minister join me in commending all those helping to raise funds and awareness this month and in recognising the many thousands of people fighting this terrible disease by making a statement about how the Government will see the job through until we have the research, the care and the cure that many, many people need?

**The Prime Minister:** I join my hon. Friend in commending all those who are raising awareness of brain cancer and who are working hard and tirelessly both on research and to raise funding. It is a devastating disease, and I was pleased to meet the noble Baroness Jowell to hear her experience of the national health service. She and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care then held a roundtable of brain cancer experts.

We have announced that an estimated £20 million will be invested through the National Institute for Health Research over the next five years in helping to fund essential brain cancer research. In addition, Cancer Research UK will be investing £25 million in research on brain tumours over the same period, helping to support two new specialised centres.

Q14. [904234] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The increasing provision of healthcare within NHS England by private providers continues to cause the fragmentation and undermining of patient services.

The Prime Minister has thus far refused to exclude such services from a US trade deal. Can she tell us how the Scottish Government will be included in the negotiations so that they can protect our Scottish NHS from being bartered away to get a deal?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady is a little late, because I was asked a question about a US trade deal and the national health service by the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) in this House on Monday, and I made it very clear that we retain the principles of the national health service and that we are not going to allow the national health service to be undermined by any trade deals we do.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Representatives of the Greater Grimsby project board will be meeting a Business Minister later today to discuss the next stage of the town deal. The proposals will be a great boost for the economy of Grimsby and Cleethorpes. Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm her support for the proposals and similar initiatives?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has raised this issue with me before, and I welcome the very strong public-private sector approach that is being pursued by the Greater Grimsby project board. He is playing an active role in the project, and I understand there have been a number of positive meetings with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. I encourage the board to continue engaging with officials on the details of the plan so that we can see that development, which is so important to the local area.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** The House knows I am always concerned, whatever the time, to protect the rights of smaller parties, and today is no exception. I call Mr Nigel Dodds.

**Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): I am grateful for your protection, Mr Speaker.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge, and indeed praise, the success of the EU negotiator, Michel Barnier, in bringing a measure of progress to the Brexit negotiations in that he has managed to unite the Government and the Opposition in utter defiance of the legal text he has brought forward from the December arrangements? Does she agree that now is the time for the EU to get on with examining the sensible, pragmatic arrangements on customs and the Northern Ireland border and to get on to the main trade negotiations?

**Mr Speaker:** We hear the right hon. Gentleman, but he has been indulged.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Now is the time for the European Union negotiators to get on with the job of discussing that trade and economic partnership for the future. I am pleased that we will also be able to discuss with the Irish Government and the Commission the practical details of delivering the solution for the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, so that the free flow of

trade can continue not just between Northern Ireland and Ireland but between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Last month it was announced that the proposed merger between the British Transport police and Police Scotland was being put on hold in the wake of widespread criticism from a number of different parties. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with devolved Ministers, and what next steps can be taken? Will she join in me in calling on the SNP to scrap this ill-fated proposed merger?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the concerns that have been expressed. Of course, we were committed to delivering on the Smith commission proposals, and as part of that we are devolving powers over the British Transport police in Scotland to the Scottish Government. As this is being looked at, the priority must remain the safety of the public, and we are committed to working with the Scottish Government to ensure a smooth transfer of the functions, should that be their decision. It is for the Scottish Government to decide, but I urge them to ensure that, as they take those decisions, they put the safety and security of the public first.

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): Is it Government policy that England should pull out of the World cup? If not, what on earth was the Foreign Secretary on about yesterday?

**The Prime Minister:** The point the Foreign Secretary was making yesterday was that, depending on what comes out of the investigation into the attack on the two individuals in Salisbury, it might be appropriate for the Government to look at whether Ministers and other dignitaries should attend the World cup in Russia.

**Leo Docherty** (Aldershot) (Con): In advance of the Prime Minister's meeting this afternoon with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, does she agree that the kingdom is in fact a force for tremendous stability in a very turbulent region? Will she offer reassurance to the Crown Prince that this country will stand with him in his efforts to bring modernity, development and reform to our very important middle eastern ally?

**The Prime Minister:** I agree with my hon. Friend. We have had a long-standing and historic relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and that will continue. It has been important in our security and defence, and in the stability of the region. Moreover, under the Crown Prince and his Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is reforming and changing and giving greater rights to women. We should encourage that and stand alongside and work with Saudi Arabia to help the Crown Prince deliver on his Vision 2030.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): Today the Department for International Development launches the Jo Cox memorial grants, which will empower women in some of the most difficult parts of our world. Will the Prime Minister join me in thanking wholeheartedly everyone at DFID who made this happen? Does she

also agree that, when it comes to preventing conflict, Jo's legacy must teach us that women's voices must be heard?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising this particular issue, and I am happy to welcome the UK aid contribution to the Jo Cox memorial grants, as announced today by my right hon. Friend the International Development Secretary. Up to £10 million is being allocated to support grassroots organisations in delivering on two causes close to Jo's heart: protecting against identity-based violence and boosting the social and economic and political empowerment of women and girls, helping to predict, prevent and protect against identity-based violence. The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Jo was a dedicated humanitarian. She fought for

gender equality at home and in developing countries, and it is right that we as a Government and as a country encourage women's voices to be heard, wherever they are.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We must now bring proceedings to a close.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** There are urgent questions that come first. If there is a point of order, it will come after that, so I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be in his seat, eagerly expectant.

## UK Relations: Saudi Arabia

12.49 pm

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement on diplomatic and economic relations with Saudi Arabia.

**The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt)**: I have been asked to respond on behalf of the Foreign Secretary, as he is currently at an engagement at the palace. The Prime Minister has invited the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, His Royal Highness Mohammed bin Salman, to visit the United Kingdom. We are delighted to welcome him and his delegation on his first official visit to the UK, which is taking place from today until Friday.

During the visit, the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince will launch a new and ambitious strategic partnership between our two countries, which will allow us to discuss a range of bilateral matters and foreign policy issues of mutual interest. The UK Government have a close and wide-ranging relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the UK's third fastest growing market for exports, and we continue to work together to address regional and international issues, including Yemen. The visit will allow for a substantive discussion between the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister on the need for a political resolution to the conflict in Yemen, and how to address the humanitarian crisis.

The UK fully supports the Crown Prince's social and economic reform programme, Vision 2030. His visit is an opportunity for him to underline his vision of an outward-looking Saudi Arabia, one that embraces a moderate and tolerant form of Islam, and a more inclusive Saudi society. This includes greater freedom for women, in line with the recent statements and reforms made by the Crown Prince. We believe these reforms are the best course for Saudi Arabia's future security, stability and prosperity, and it is right that the UK supports the Crown Prince in his Vision 2030 endeavours.

**Sir Vince Cable**: Further to the exchange in Prime Minister's questions, may I say that there will be widespread concern across parties about the fact that the dictatorial head of a medieval, theocratic regime is being given the red carpet equivalent of a state visit? May I ask specifically whether the Foreign Secretary will be demanding the ending of the bombing of civilian targets in the Yemen civil war, which Prince Mohammed initiated? Can the Minister explain why the safeguards on the use of British weapons, which were introduced at the end of the coalition at my insistence and that of my Liberal Democrat colleagues, are, apparently, no longer being applied? Will the Foreign Secretary insist on the ending of the blockade of ports in Yemen, which is contributing to the devastating humanitarian crisis and famine, of which we have heard much in this House? Will he defend the nuclear agreement with Iran, to which we are a party and which Prime Mohammed is actively seeking to undermine? Will he condemn the attempt by Prince Mohammed to fan the flames of sectarian conflict in Lebanon, Syria, Qatar and elsewhere? Has the Minister consulted the Government Economic Service on the current economic position of Saudi Arabia, which is no longer a swing oil producer and is running out of

money, and where the main potential long-term deal available to the UK is the Saudi Aramco flotation, which will be achieved only by substantially devaluing the standards applied in the City of London?

Finally, on the threshold of International Women's Day, may I ask whether the Minister intends to endorse Prince Mohammed's view of modernisation: that women should be allowed to go to football matches, but not be allowed to marry, divorce, travel, have a driving licence or have an operation without the approval of their male relatives?

**Alistair Burt**: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his questions. His starting point and opening view of Saudi Arabia represents one of the reasons why the Crown Prince is here. The right hon. Gentleman used the word "medieval", and the Crown Prince has been conducting a series of reforms and has made clear statements about where he wants to take the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Everyone is aware of its history and its past, but it is really important to look at what is happening at present—good things as well as difficult things—and to point the way forward that he has with Vision 2030, both in economic and society terms. When he speaks about a modernising country supporting moderate Islam, that should be taken as seriously as any reference to the Kingdom in the past.

The right hon. Gentleman asked a series of questions. He referred to the war in Yemen as being "initiated" by Saudi Arabia, but that is not correct. What happened was that an insurgency overthrew a legitimate Government, which was backed by the United Nations, and then sought support from their neighbours in order to deal with the insurgency. The insurgency is cruel: the Houthi have executed a number of people, not least the former President of Yemen; they hold people to ransom in areas that they occupy; and they have been preventing people from getting humanitarian aid. We support the efforts of the Saudi-led coalition in order to defend Yemen against the insurgency and, more importantly, to bring the conflict to an end. That is the most important thing, but it will take both parties to do this, not just the Saudis. On weapons sales, these are as strict as any in the world, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware, and there was a court case last year. We keep this under strict check to ensure that international humanitarian law is abided by and to make sure we can provide the support to Saudi Arabia that it needs to protect itself, not least in relation to weapons directed from Yemen towards its capital city—that should also not be forgotten.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to a blockade. There is no blockade; there are now no restrictions on the ports—the ports are open. There was a restriction from 19 December, following a missile attack on the capital of Yemen by Houthi forces. There is a strong suspicion that weapons were being smuggled into the country. That is why the restrictions were in place. Since 20 December, a total of 50 ships have docked, and the ports are open.<sup>1</sup> The UK has played a substantial part in ensuring that those ports are open and that humanitarian aid comes in. We will strongly defend the joint comprehensive plan of action, which we believe is in the UK's interests and those of the region.

On the economic prospects of Saudi Arabia, we know the area is changing, and that is what Vision 2030 is about; it is about moving, in time, from an oil-based

1. [Official Report, 12 March 2018, Vol. 637, c. 3MC.]

economy to something different. This provides tremendous opportunities for the region, as well as for Saudi Arabia, and we strongly support that. We would like the Aramco share option to be issued in the UK and we will continue to suggest that the City would be the best place for it.

Lastly, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned International Women's Day. It is of course obvious to us that some of the easing in things relating to women in Saudi Arabia seems incredibly mundane—the ability to attend a football match and for the cinemas to be open, the mixed space and the ability to drive—but in a Saudi context, and in the context of a conservative region, these changes have immense significance. We do not always appreciate that, but we need to make reference to it. That further progress seems likely is very much in everyone's minds, so we should not judge the progress to date as a full stop. The engagement of women, not only in the areas we have mentioned, but increasingly in business and in government, makes a real difference to the area. International Women's Day is enhanced, to a degree, by the sorts of changes we have seen in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Members can be sure that our Prime Minister will make sure that that progress gets every support from the UK as we move forward.

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his comprehensive answer to the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable). Is my right hon. Friend as surprised as I am that the question was shorn of the context of the scale of the reforms now taking place in Saudi Arabia? May I urge the Government to continue our assistance to the Government of Saudi Arabia in order to deliver the astonishing scale of ambition associated with Vision 2030?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who rightly sets this in context. No one denies that there are difficult aspects to a relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, just as there are with a number of engagements the UK has with countries whose views and human rights issues we do not always share. But the important point he made is about having engagement to seek a common view of a future, one that, as he rightly says, is changing markedly and in a way that no one quite anticipated because of the arrival of the Crown Prince in his position. He could well have an influence on the region for the next 30 years, and our engagement and support for the moderate, modernising image he has for Saudi Arabia is important to all of us.

**Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab):** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) on securing it, even if it was ahead of my own application.

Let me make it clear at the outset that the Opposition want to have a good diplomatic and economic relationship with Saudi Arabia. But, as in any good relationship, there must be honesty. Most importantly, we must tell Saudi Arabia that as long as it continues the indiscriminate bombing of residential areas, farms and markets in Yemen, and as long as it continues to restrict the flow of food, medical supplies and fuels to a population suffering mass epidemics of malnutrition and cholera, it should not expect our support for that war and its Crown Prince does not deserve to have the red carpet rolled out for him here in Britain.

Let us look at the man to whom the British Government are bowing and scraping today. He is the architect of the Saudi air strikes and the blockade in Yemen; he is funding jihadi groups in the Syrian civil war and ordered his guards to beat up the Prime Minister of Lebanon. In the eight months since he became Crown Prince, he has doubled the number of executions in Saudi Arabia. But we are supposed to ignore all that because of his proposal that Saudi women be allowed to drive, just as they can everywhere else in the world.

The UK Government pretend to care about human rights and war crimes, but when it comes to Saudi Arabia and Yemen, there is nothing but a shameful silence. We all know that that is because all that they ultimately care about is how to plug the hole in trade and growth that is coming because of their Brexit plans. If the Minister wants to dispute that, will he answer one simple question? When are the Government going to stop bowing down to Saudi Arabia and instead use our role as United Nations penholder on Yemen to demand an immediate ceasefire, an end to the blockade, proper peace talks and a permanent end to this dreadful, shameful war?

**Alistair Burt:** I thank the right hon. Lady for her words. She started well by talking about wanting to welcome a relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Should she actually occupy my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's position, she might want to review some of the personal comments that she made after that and wonder how that would constitute a decent start to the relationship that she wants to see.

Let me get to the substance and deal with one or two of the right hon. Lady's questions. First, there is not indiscriminate bombing of civilians, as has been alleged. It is vital that we make sure that, in dealing with the military aspects of the conflict, which was not started by Saudi Arabia, we are able to see that, in terms of international humanitarian law, there is only the targeting of legitimate military targets. The United Kingdom has been as helpful as possible in trying to make sure that the training for that is appropriate. When there have been allegations of civilian casualties, those cases have been dealt with, monitored and investigated in a manner completely different from that in respect of Houthi activity, which I noticed the right hon. Lady did not seek to condemn in any way at all.

On the humanitarian issues, as I indicated, there is not a blockade or restriction of goods coming in. It is important that commercial food and fuel gets in. It is equally important that those who have had missiles targeted at them after those missiles have been smuggled into Yemen are able to protect themselves. We have worked hard to try to ensure that there is protection for Saudi Arabia from missiles coming in and, in doing so, to give Saudi Arabia the confidence to allow more ships to come in to deal with the humanitarian issues. That seems to me to be a constructive way to deal with both sides of the issues, rather than the straightforward condemnation that we heard from the right hon. Lady.

In respect of the current reforms in Saudi Arabia and those going forward, the right hon. Lady reduces them to de minimis by saying that it is all about women driving. As I indicated to the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable), who I have to say asked a rather more serious set of questions, the issue of

[Alistair Burt]

women's progress is not simply about driving; it is about a whole series of other reforms. Driving has a totemic importance for many people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but should not be taken as the sole thing that is changing.

There has been no silence from the United Kingdom on Yemen. We have been very clear about the fact that there is no military solution, which is why we have been working so hard for a diplomatic solution, why we welcome the newly appointed UN envoy, whom the right hon. Lady did not mention, and why we are doing everything we can to try to make sure that there is a diplomatic base. All our evidence is that ceasefires work when there is some relationship on the ground that makes them plausible and feasible. Because of the activity of the Houthis, those who support them and those who direct weapons at Saudi Arabia, it is not possible for there to be a ceasefire with any sense of purpose or sense that it would actually work. What we must do—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Minister of State is in full flow, and we are listening to the flow of his eloquence and the eloquence of his flow. I say very gently to the shadow Foreign Secretary, who is normally a most restrained individual, that I understand how incredibly passionate she is but feel sure that in a courtroom she would not chunter noisily from a sedentary position, because she would earn the wrath of the judge.

**Alistair Burt:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Let me be straightforward: calling for a ceasefire is not the same as having one. We all want to see an end to the conflict in Yemen, and we have said that very clearly to the Saudi coalition. We support the appointment of the new UN envoy and we are working for a ceasefire, but simply calling for one does not do it. We have to make sure that we have the facts on the ground so that we can make sure that a ceasefire actually works.

**Emily Thornberry** *indicated dissent.*

**Alistair Burt:** It is all very well for the right hon. Lady to shake her head, but she is not faced with some of the issues that face Government Ministers on this issue, and nor is she giving full credit to the efforts that are being made to try to bring this matter to an end. She is not the sole holder of conscience in this place as we deal with the difficulties of trying to address the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. That is what we are seeking to do and we will continue to bend all our efforts to that, with or without her support.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am happy to confirm that neither “Erskine May” nor any Standing Order of the House prohibits the shaking or, indeed, for that matter, the nodding of heads.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con) *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Ah, another person who has been noisily chuntering from a sedentary position. She can now speak from her feet. I call Anna Soubry.

**Anna Soubry:** I would never do such a thing, Mr Speaker.

As you know, Mr Speaker, I am a feminist. When I was a Health Minister—serving in the same Government as the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable), I might add—I had the honour to lead a delegation to Saudi Arabia, as a woman, obviously. At no time did I find any prejudice or disrespect, and I was quite surprised about that.

I commend all my right hon. Friend the Minister's fine words. Does he agree that although we are obviously a long way from seeing in the Kingdom the sort of rights that we would expect of any modern civilised society, the best way to achieve those rights and to influence that country is to have firm conversations and a good relationship in private?

**Mr Speaker:** All I would say to the right hon. Lady, in the friendliest possible spirit, is that if in the course of her visit she met, for example, a prince, it might well be that that person thought that he was meeting a fellow royal.

**Alistair Burt:** I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) for her regally dispensed question. I absolutely concur with her sentiments. We do talk very frankly and honestly to counterparts, even in the most difficult circumstances. It is right that we express our interest in how reforms are going. They will not lead to a society that we have developed after many hundreds of years, but the progress that is being made is significant in the context of where Saudi Arabia wants to go and how it wants to lead the region. To talk about moderate Islam in an area where those who promote moderate Islam are at risk and threatened by others takes a degree of bravery and courage from the Saudi Arabian leadership. That is what we recognise. There is more to go, more work to do and more concerns to be expressed, but as my right hon. Friend said, making sure that it is done with engagement is a key part of the process.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the Minister for once again coming to the Chamber to answer this urgent question. He will be aware that Yemen has been described as the world's worst man-made humanitarian disaster. Members have been quite right to highlight the issue of women's rights in Saudi Arabia ahead of International Women's Day tomorrow. Will he also be raising the plight of women in Yemen, who, it has been reported, often have to choose which child to save owing to the cholera and famine effected by that conflict? The UK has leverage. Since the start of the war, UK arms sales have outstripped aid to Yemen 18 times over. Will he use that leverage? Finally—this is a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald)—will he have discussions about the fact that Raif Badawi is not a criminal?

**Alistair Burt:** I will, if I may, address two issues. In relation to Yemen, no one denies the scale of the humanitarian crisis. I have met officials from the UN, the Red Cross and the World Health Organisation, and we are as confident as we can be that support to prevent the next round of cholera will be in place. Of course, none of it should be necessary. If the conflict were ended, these concerns would not be raised, and that, of course, is what we are bending all our efforts to.

I genuinely wish it was as straightforward as saying to one of the parties to the conflict—to the party that did not start it—“if you stop doing anything, everything will be all right.” I honestly do not believe that that is the answer, which is why we work through other methods and other means. We have done all we can in relation to providing food, fuel and water and supporting those who deliver it, but the restrictions are caused by the conflict. They are caused by those who support the insurgents and what they have done, and we will do all we can to break that down. We do indeed raise the case of the blogger. We have followed that case very carefully and raised our concerns with Saudi Arabia.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend welcome the Crown Prince’s statement that his goal is to build a country of moderate Islam that is open to all religions and to the world? Will this Government be encouraging and influencing them to follow through on this and build on their recent social reforms?

**Alistair Burt:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. As I mentioned earlier, that statement about moderate Islam is something that we would all take for granted here, but we should set it in a context in which there are disputes about where Islam should go, what we have seen in relation to Daesh, and the propaganda that emerges from those who would see Islam taking quite a different course. The fact that the statement comes from someone who will, in time, be the custodian of the two holy mosques is really very significant, and she is right to draw attention to that.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): We all want to see a modernised and moderate regime in Saudi Arabia, but according to the charity Reprieve, the Government have called for an additional eight executioners to be recruited. Meanwhile, 18 people, mostly young, some of whom were arrested on demonstrations while they were children, remain on death row. Can the Minister assure us that the Government will be raising their plight with the Saudi Prince while he is here?

**Alistair Burt:** The United Kingdom stands full square against the use of execution and against the use of the death penalty, and whether it is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or anywhere else, including the United States and China, we make that explicitly clear. We do take up cases. We have been concerned with those cases where minors might have been indicted, and we have received assurances in relation to them. There is no doubt that if reforms continue in relation to the changing of the nature of offences that attract the death penalty, which seems to be one way in which its use can be reduced, the United Kingdom will welcome that. None the less, we stand full square against the use of the death penalty in any circumstances.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Those of us who have been to Saudi recently have seen how quickly things are changing in such a deeply traditional country. With International Women’s Day tomorrow, does my right hon. Friend agree that, actually, this is a good opportunity to welcome the progress being made on rights and opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter. The purpose of parliamentary visits, in which many Members engage, is to get an opportunity to see the context of a country. It is not about being given a grand tour of easy options, but about getting the chance to ask difficult questions. In my experience, Members of Parliament take that opportunity fully. To be able to observe, as my hon. Friend has, some of the palpable changes in where women are going and to speak to women now involved in culture, music and business, is to see where the country intends to take itself, and a woman’s voice in where it is going is an important one and increasingly heard.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My constituents, from Garnethill to Strathbungo and Dumbreck to Toryglen, have all been emailing me with deep concerns over the hospitality being afforded to the Saudi royalty against the backdrop of children regularly killed by the bombs that we are selling them. What more are the Government doing to ensure that the Saudis carry out the full implementation of the UN humanitarian response plan? Children in Yemen are dying far, far too frequently every single day and Yemen just cannot wait.

**Alistair Burt:** I agree with the hon. Lady—no, of course, Yemen cannot wait. As I said earlier, if I believed for a moment that asking one party to the conflict simply to stop its activities would bring an end to it, then we would all advocate that solution, but I do not believe that that is the case. There must be a negotiated end; it should come as quickly as possible, and we have been pressing for that for some considerable time. In the meantime, we are doing everything we can to ease the humanitarian situation, and we have seen an easing of restrictions, particularly since the visits of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development to Djibouti and to Riyadh in December, where she was able to explain to the coalition exactly what the international community was doing to seek to protect them. That led to an easing of the restrictions straight away, but nothing will truly help the people of Yemen until the conflict comes to an end. On that, she, her constituents and all the rest of us are absolutely right.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am very keen to accommodate remaining colleagues, but there is another urgent question to follow. We are immensely appreciative of the fund of knowledge and wisdom that is regularly on display from the right hon. Gentleman, but perhaps I may be permitted gently to observe that there is also no procedural or Standing Order bar, where appropriate in the mind of the Minister, on single-sentence answers to questions.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend welcome the social reforms already undertaken by the Crown Prince, and can he confirm that the Government will be encouraging the Saudi authorities to go further in this regard, because the very best way to influence them is to keep the door open? Let me also say, out of interest, that 52% of all graduates in the Kingdom in 2017 were women. There are 30 women members of the Shura Council, which proportionately is more than in the Senate. Of particular interest to me

[Rebecca Pow]

is the fact that, in the transformation plan, there are some very, very positive moves on the environment, and these will have a far-reaching effect not just on the people of Saudi Arabia, but indeed globally.

**Mr Speaker:** No doubt in Taunton Deane.

**Alistair Burt:** As I could not put it any better myself, may I say that I agree with my hon. Friend, and that the United Kingdom will continue to give support in the direction that she advocates.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister share my fear that people in positions of responsibility may unwittingly put themselves on the side of prolonging, and indeed potentially worsening, the crisis if they, either by deceit or by design, choose to ignore areas where the Kingdom has, in part, corrected what were at times deplorable mistakes in its initial conduct of the conflict?

**Alistair Burt:** The hon. Gentleman has a deep knowledge of the area and the complexities involved. The conflict requires handling with balance, as do any of these difficult circumstances. We are right to understand the cause of the conflict, right to understand concerns that have been raised in its conduct, and right also to acknowledge that things have changed because of international pressure. Ultimately, when there is a situation in which an insurgency brings in external forces to attack a state, it could lead to an unfortunate set of consequences for the future if that state left the situation undealt with. That is why we want to see the matter resolved, with the safety and security of Saudi and Yemen at the heart of a future peace arrangement.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that the intervention of Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners in Yemen was at the request of the legitimate Government of that country? Does he also agree that the principal insurgents, the Houthis and their allies, Hezbollah, are funded and supplied by Iran whose actions are significantly prolonging the conflict in that country?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his observations. Although the circumstances in Yemen are indeed dire and call for a conclusion to the conflict, not to understand the origins of the conflict and how it was started—the call for help and assistance by the legitimate Government—would be to fail to understand how the conflict can properly be brought to a conclusion. That outside influences have been involved, causing great danger, and great fears and concerns, in the region is also extremely clear.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister mentioned the two holy places. Hundreds of thousands—probably millions—of British citizens aspire to go or will go on the Hajj. During these discussions, will he be raising the issues about their security, and the way in which they are treated? Will he also emphasise the importance of Saudi Arabia revitalising the Arab peace initiative for a middle east peace settlement?

**Alistair Burt:** I would say two things. First, in relation to the Hajj, I do not know what is definitely on the agenda for each detail of the talks, but the hon. Gentleman and the House can be assured that the safety of those going to Hajj from the United Kingdom is always important, and often raised by the ambassador; and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia knows how important that is to all who undertake the pilgrimage.

On the Arab peace initiative, yes, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I am really interested in how the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia might respond to anything we see soon from the US envoys. The Arab peace initiative, which lies at the basis of potential solutions, as it has for some time, remains very much in the minds of those who want to see peace between the Palestinians and Israel.

**Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): Historically, Saudi Arabia has channelled hundreds of millions, if not billions of pounds into the violent end of Islamic extremism all around the world. In my right hon. Friend's assessment, has that approach shifted visibly under the Crown Prince?

**Alistair Burt:** The short answer to that is yes. We are all well aware of recent history, and that elements in Saudi Arabia may have been involved in elements of violent extremism. I think the setting of the Crown Prince's face and his state against that, by calling for moderate Islam and for a modernisation, which flies in the face of those very extremists, is making clear the way in which Saudi Arabia wants to deal with its past and seek an alternative future.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): There is no mention at all of human rights in the Crown Prince's modernisation programme, Vision 2030—perhaps not surprisingly, as more than 300 people have been executed since it was launched, including children and peaceful protesters. I was not sure whether the Minister said that the issue of executions, beheadings and crucifixions would be raised with the Crown Prince. May I ask that it is, and specifically the issue of the juveniles who have been on death row for many years—Ali al-Nimr, Dawoud al-Marhoon and Abdullah al-Zaher?

**Alistair Burt:** I made clear to the House a moment ago the United Kingdom's feelings about the death penalty—that the issue is raised, that it is not our policy, and that it is not a policy that we support in any state. We have raised the case of the minors, seeking a situation where they might not be executed. That matter remains very much a matter of concern to the United Kingdom, which is why we talk about it publicly and raise it privately as well.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): It was self-evident earlier that Houthi propaganda has been remarkably effective. Is there anything we could learn from that?

**Alistair Burt:** I defer to my right hon. Friend in his knowledge of propaganda and how it might be used. I am not sure whose voices are listened to most in relation to this matter. As the Houthi are not a state, because of history, it has been very easy to target the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in this case. A more comprehensive picture of the conflict would perhaps lead to different conclusions.

The conclusion, however, that we all want the conflict to end, so that there can be a durable peace and better security for the people of Yemen, who deserve better governance than they have had for some decades, is a matter of importance to us all.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): In the last month there has been huge disruption in access for international aid into Yemen's ports on the Red sea. Given that that is primarily caused by Saudi Arabian blockades, will the Minister ensure that it is brought up with the Crown Prince as a matter of urgency, and that it is a serious objective of the UK Government to reopen those ports and allow access for humanitarian aid to the 22 million people in need of urgent assistance?

**Alistair Burt:** I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I gave the House a moment ago. The restrictions were imposed because of the Saudis' quite legitimate concerns that weapons, or weapons parts, that are directed against them are smuggled into Yemen. We wanted to give the assurance that we would do all we could to try to prevent that, and that in the process the restrictions on ships coming in could be eased. We have seen an easing of those restrictions. The ports are now open. Fifty ships have docked since the restrictions were imposed in December, and we shall do all we can.<sup>1</sup> The United Kingdom has taken a leading part, both in reassuring the coalition about the direction of missiles towards it, and in making the point about the crucial and urgent need for both commercial and humanitarian aid to enter Yemen.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): In seeking to explore the context for a ceasefire, does the UK believe that Iran has broken any United Nations sanctions?

**Alistair Burt:** Yes; I thank my hon. Friend for the question. The UN panel of experts held very clearly, within recent weeks, that Iran had not been able to demonstrate that it had abided by UN resolution 2216, which is about the availability of weapons going to Yemen. That was what caused concern about the breach of UN sanctions. It emphasises again external interest in Yemen. That should also come to an end as part of a comprehensive peace agreement.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Over the past 24 hours, my inbox has been flooded by messages from constituents who want to see a ceasefire in Yemen, and the Minister has just said a number of times that the Government want an end to the conflict in Yemen. How does he square that circle, though, when this Government have been facilitating £4.6 billion-worth of arms sales, making us complicit in Yemen?

**Alistair Burt:** I understand the question. I repeat that the relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in terms of its defence and its place in a difficult and quite hostile region, is long-standing. In relation to Yemen, any arms exports are covered by extremely strict legal guarantees and the scrutiny of this House and the courts.

In relation to ending the conflict, as I said, it is not as simple as saying to one party, "Stop doing this and all will be all right." When they have on their borders those

who have made incursions into Saudi Arabia before, and when they have missiles directed at them, I do not think it would have any credibility. Accordingly, we must continue to do all we can, through the UN, to bring an end to this conflict. Military pressure on a Houthi insurgency has been part of that process, but clearly, as we have said before, we do not see a military solution to this; we see a process leading to negotiations and an end to the conflict as soon as possible.

**Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): The Crown Prince has been absolutely clear that he wants to build a moderate, modern future for Saudi Arabia. The whole House would want to see him achieve that. Does the Minister agree that the best way to bring that about is to work with him and to assist him, not build diplomatic walls between our two countries?

**Alistair Burt:** I agree with my hon. Friend. That is indeed the point of the engagement, which, I can again assure the House, covers the very positive parts of what is happening in Saudi Arabia, such as reforms and modernisation, but does not shy away from the difficult things that I know are on the minds both of Members and their constituents.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): It is right that we engage with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and it would be unrealistic to suggest that we do not. A number of us have a concern around the attitude to freedom of religion—people's right to practise their own faith in the Kingdom. Can he reassure me that such issues will be raised during the visit to the UK?

**Alistair Burt:** Freedom of religion is a particularly difficult issue because of Saudi Arabia's position as the custodian of the two holy mosques. We are absolutely clear: greater tolerance throughout the region, one faith for another, is crucial if the region is to move away from the path of confrontation on which it appears set. There will always be a voice here for tolerance of other faiths, and for progressive moves towards freedom of faith throughout the region.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): I refer to my entry in the register. I know it will embarrass my right hon. Friend, but can I invite him to comment or reflect upon this? Relations between countries will often depend on the quality and diligence of our diplomatic ambassadors overseas. We are very lucky to have a first-class ambassador to Saudi Arabia. He has converted to Islam and undertaken the Hajj, and I have seen at first hand the close, honest relationship that he has with the Government of Saudi Arabia. He is a pinnacle and best example of our diplomatic corps, and this House should be grateful to him for helping to occasion this important visit, which certainly I welcome.

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that. Behind all the efforts of Ministers at the Dispatch Box is an extraordinary diplomatic team, of which our ambassador in Riyadh, Simon Collis, is a perfect example. I fully endorse everything that my hon. Friend has said. I would also mention Simon Shercliff, who has just stepped down as our ambassador to Yemen, and all the efforts that he made, and we wish Michael Aron, the new ambassador to Yemen, very well. It is a

1. [Official Report, 12 March 2018, Vol. 637, c. 4MC.]

[Alistair Burt]

first-class team and is representative of a first-class team throughout the region, which I have the honour to represent.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I gather it relates to the exchanges that have just taken place.

**Rebecca Pow:** I would like to put it on record, for clarification, that I went on a delegation to Saudi Arabia. I want to be quite clear about that.

**Mr Speaker:** I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for putting that on the record. The House will appreciate it.

## Blagging: Leveson Inquiry

1.31 pm

**Tom Watson** (West Bromwich East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the allegations of blagging at *The Sunday Times* and the relevance of these to the Leveson public inquiry.

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock):** This morning we saw reports in the media of a potential fraud and data protection breach by a former private investigator. The allegations are of behaviour that appears totally unacceptable and potentially criminal. Investigation is therefore a matter for the police, and the House will understand that there is only so far that I can go in discussing the specific details and allegations.

More broadly, some people have already formed the conclusion that this revelation should require us to change policy on press regulation. Policy, of course, should always be based on all available information. It is worth noting that the activity described apparently stopped around 2010, before the establishment of the Leveson inquiry. Indeed, it was precisely because of such cases that the Leveson inquiry was set up. This sort of behaviour was covered by the terms of reference of that inquiry, and Mr Ford's activities were raised as part of the inquiry.

As we discussed in the House last week, and again on Monday, there have been three detailed police investigations. A wide range of offences were examined; over 40 people were convicted, and many went to prison. Today's revelations, if proven, are clearly already covered by the law and appear to be in contravention of section 55 of the Data Protection Act 1998. As described, they would also appear to be in contravention of the new Data Protection Bill that is currently before the House.

What is more, the fact that this activity stopped in 2010 underlines the point that the world has changed. Practices such as these have been investigated. Newspapers today are in a very different position from when the alleged offences took place. That view is in fact strengthened by today's example, because the behaviour that we have discovered today was from before the Leveson inquiry, and existing law is in place to deal with it. Criminal behaviour should be dealt with by the police and the courts, and anyone who has committed a criminal offence should face the full force of the law.

The future of a vibrant, free and independent press matters to us all. We are committed to protecting it. We want to see the highest standards, and we must face the challenges of today to ensure that Britain has high-quality journalism and high-quality discourse to underpin our democracy for the years to come.

**Tom Watson:** I refer to my entry in the register.

The world has not changed. The "one rogue blagger" defence—it has been uttered from the mouth of the Secretary of State. When he announced last week that he was dropping the Leveson inquiry, the Culture Secretary said he was doing so because the inquiry

“looked into everything in this area, and it was followed by three police investigations...We looked into these things as a society. We had a comprehensive Leveson inquiry.”—[*Official Report*, 1 March 2018; Vol. 636, c. 974.]

He told us that the matter was closed—there was nothing more to see. Well, overnight, the BBC has reported allegations by another whistleblower, John Ford, who says that he was a blagger for *The Sunday Times* for 15 years—a newspaper that the Secretary of State did not even mention.

Mr Ford claimed that he obtained private bank and mortgage information about Cabinet members and public figures. He says that his activity for the paper was illegal, intrusive and ultimately wrong. In his evidence to the first half of the public inquiry, *Times* editor John Witherow, who then edited *The Sunday Times*, conceded that Ford had worked for the paper, but did not reveal that he had done so for over a decade. Today, *The Sunday Times* has disputed the new claims.

The second half of the Leveson inquiry could establish where the truth lies. That is what it was set up to do, but the Government are closing down the public inquiry before it has done its work, despite Sir Brian Leveson saying that he fundamentally disagrees with that decision, along with 130,000 concerned citizens who said it should go ahead and whom the Secretary of State has chosen to disregard. He is capitulating to the press barons, who want to use their raw power to close down a national public inquiry. In the light of the new allegations, will he reconsider his decision on the public inquiry into illegality in the press? If not, how will he assure the House and the public that these new allegations of criminal behaviour by *The Sunday Times* will be fully investigated? Is it not now clear to him that too many questions remain unanswered to justify the decision to break David Cameron’s solemn promise to the victims of press abuse?

**Matt Hancock:** I think I covered all those questions in my statement. As I mentioned, not only did the Leveson inquiry have terms of reference that covered this type of allegation, but this person was raised at the Leveson inquiry. As the hon. Gentleman implied, it is of course a matter for the police to follow up any evidence of criminal wrongdoing. He also asked whether we should therefore bring in an inquiry that is backward-looking and bring in rules that would help to undermine further the free press that we need, notably section 40. The answer to both those questions last week was clearly no, and this new evidence, of activity that it appears took place up to 2010—therefore, up to seven years ago—is not a reason to reopen decisions that were taken exactly on the basis that the world has changed. If anything, this evidence demonstrates further how much things have changed.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): I was Justice Secretary when we set up the Leveson inquiry and when we promised the second stage of the inquiry, so my right hon. Friend will not be surprised to discover that I share some of Sir Brian Leveson and other people’s disappointment that the second-stage inquiry was postponed. Does my right hon. Friend really think that there is no longer sufficient public interest in new allegations of this kind or in knowing which newspapers were bribing which policemen because it was as long ago as seven years? Does he think that the best newspapers in

this country would accept that judgment for a moment if it was applied to any other sector of the economy? We have public inquiries in hand at the moment looking into much older things—allegations of sexual abuse, the haemophilia tragedy, and others—so will he not wait until we have a new allegation that is post-2011 before at least thinking again a bit about his decision?

**Matt Hancock:** I respect my right hon. and learned Friend’s view. Indeed, it was an honour to serve with him in government. But the question that faces us is: what is the right thing to do now to ensure that we have high-quality democratic discourse, when the press face such great challenges, and to tackle fake news, deliberate disinformation, clickbait and the impact of the internet, which was hardly covered by this inquiry? We are taking that work forward. As I mentioned in my statement, allegations of behaviour such as this were covered and looked into by the original inquiry, and there were extensive police investigations. If it comes to another police case into these allegations, the existing law is there to cover it.

**Brendan O’Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Clearly these new reports are worrying and only add to the serious concerns that many of us across the House have about the behaviour of the press. Scottish National party Members have always said that individuals should be able to seek redress when they feel they have been the victim of press malpractice, and it benefits every one of us to have a media that is both transparent and accountable.

I repeat that if Leveson 2 is to be set up, the Scottish Government must be consulted and Scotland’s distinct legal system recognised. In those circumstances, we would support efforts to establish a new UK-wide press inquiry. What action, if any, is the Secretary of State proposing to take on these new allegations? Can he guarantee that if an inquiry is established, it would happen only after consultation with the Scottish Government and would take into account and respect Scotland’s distinct legal system?

**Matt Hancock:** Of course I respect the constitutional settlement. Action is necessary as a result of these revelations, and it is action for the police into allegations of what appear to be criminal activities.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): The Secretary of State is right to say that criminality is a matter for the police, but does he feel that the Information Commissioner, who has the right to investigate breaches of personal data, has all the power she needs? Is he listening to her calls to further strengthen her powers through the Data Protection Bill?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, of course. We have a good working relationship with the Information Commissioner. Her powers are being strengthened by the Data Protection Bill, and I am sure that the level to which and the ways in which they are strengthened will be properly scrutinised as the Bill goes through Committee and further stages.

**Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab): I urge the Secretary of State to stop trying to hide behind the Leveson inquiry, because the man who was responsible

[Edward Miliband]

for that inquiry says he fundamentally disagrees with him. In the remarkable letter he wrote to the Secretary of State, he said:

“I have no doubt that there is still a legitimate expectation on behalf of the public and, in particular, the alleged victims of phone hacking and other unlawful conduct, that there will be a full public examination of the circumstances that allowed that behaviour to develop and clear reassurances that nothing of the same scale could occur again”.

That is the point. Of course the police can look into specific instances, but the question Sir Brian is posing is: what was the culture that allowed those practices to happen, and how can we have reassurance that that culture has changed? How can we have that reassurance without a Leveson 2 inquiry?

**Matt Hancock:** Not only has there already been a Leveson inquiry into those areas, but the culture has clearly changed, and the fact that these practices ended in 2010 underlines the fact that they are historical. What we now have to address is how we ensure that there is high-quality journalism in the years to come, rather than revisiting the time when the right hon. Gentleman was at the height of his powers.

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that revelations of blagging by private investigators employed by newspapers have been known about ever since Operation Motorman and the subsequent report by the Information Commissioner, which was more than 10 years ago and led to prosecutions and convictions? He is absolutely right that newspapers today face real challenges, and it is those that we should be looking into through the inquiry that the Government have set up, rather than revisiting events of a decade ago.

**Matt Hancock:** It was a great pleasure to serve in government with my right hon. Friend, who preceded me in this job. He has great wisdom in this area and understands the challenges faced in having a high-quality media with high-quality journalism that must behave appropriately and ensuring that people have redress, such as in the low-cost arbitration system that now exists. He put a lot of work into putting all of that into place, and I pay tribute to him and agree with what he said.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): The thing is, we heard time and time again that it was just one rogue reporter and one rogue newspaper, and then that it was just one rogue company. We now learn, because of civil actions that people have had to put their homes in danger to be able to take, and because of revelations last night, that it was very extensive, including *The Sunday Times*, which thus far has always denied any involvement in this kind of activity. Last week, the Secretary of State said that he hoped there would be improvements to the press complaints system. What improvements would he like to see?

**Matt Hancock:** I want the low-cost arbitration system that has been put in place by the Independent Press Standards Organisation to work. At the moment, we have not seen a full case go through it. It has just been

put in place, in November, and I want to see it work better. I want to make sure that when wrong decisions are made, there is a proper acknowledgment of and apology for that.

**Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): Those who believe in a truly free press should not accept IPSO, and those who do not believe in a truly free press cannot accept it either. In the light of these criminal confessions, which only *The Guardian* and the BBC reported, does my right hon. Friend agree that implementing section 40 would be more in the spirit of building a country that works for everyone than the current system, whereby only the very rich can challenge the press?

**Matt Hancock:** I have a lot of time for my hon. Friend. Making sure the country works for everyone means making sure we have a press that can investigate people and cannot be put off such investigations by the threat of costs, even if everything they report is accurate. Therefore, I think that section 40 is not appropriate, but it is important that we have proper redress through IPSO, which has recently brought in a new system, and, as I said in my previous response, I would like to see that working.

**Mr Speaker:** I am sure the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) will go about his business with an additional glint in his eye and spring in his step as a result of enjoying the approbation of no less a figure than the Secretary of State.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State agree that as well as being criminal, the behaviour described by John Ford would be actionable in civil law? If section 40 were enforced, it would be of considerable benefit to any member of the public who was a potential claimant, particularly if the publisher of *The Sunday Times* were held to be vicariously liable for the criminal and civilly actionable behaviour.

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. and learned Lady has demonstrated just how much this is a matter for the courts and potentially criminal. She raises the issue of civil action. That is how in this country we deal with misdoing such as this that is potentially criminal.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that if the allegations published are true, they would be criminal acts and could be prosecuted today, without any recourse to either Leveson 2 or indeed any other inquiry? If there is a concern about access to funds, might Mr Mosley and his supporters fund such an action?

**Matt Hancock:** Certainly the allegations we have read about are potentially criminal, and dealing with that is a matter not for Ministers but, rightly, for the police.

**Darren Jones** (Bristol North West) (Lab): Hundreds of thousands of the British people, Lord Leveson and now the revelations from Mr Ford have made it clear that this matter is not closed, which might lead the public to ask: what is there to hide? Why will the Secretary of State not just let Leveson 2 take place, so that he can once and for all put a line under it and show that, as he attests, the world has indeed moved on?

**Matt Hancock:** Because I am concentrating on what we need for the future, not on what happened more than seven years ago.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): *The Sunday Times* blagging revelations are deeply disquieting, but they are historical. Can my right hon. Friend assure me and the victims of press intrusion, in particular those who face it in times of bereavement, that the new model of regulation introduced since the Leveson inquiry makes such activities much less likely and that there are proper sanctions in place?

**Matt Hancock:** Not only is that what is in place, but it is what must be in place. Ensuring that that happens and that, at the same time, the free press is protected and standards are protected is extremely important.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): The Secretary of State tells us that the world has changed. May I remind him that when the Press Council was set up we were assured the world had changed, and then when the Press Complaints Commission was set up we were assured the world had changed? We do not know it has changed; we do not know that this action stopped with the Leveson inquiry. Perhaps the only way we would know was if we had Leveson 2. Will he reconsider having Leveson 2?

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Lady tries to argue that things are not different from seven years ago. The challenges facing the press are different, but the polity is also different. We have legislative changes in the rules for the police—we have a new police code of ethics—and on the press side, we have a wholly new regulator. The idea that things are the same as they were is undermined by the fact that this is historical activity, not recent activity.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): A free and independent press, especially local press, is a pillar of our democracy. It is vital that the press adhere to the highest ethical and journalistic standards and that any criminal allegations are fully investigated, and it is also vital that that freedom is preserved and respected. It is a difficult balance to strike, but will my right hon. Friend reassure me that it is exactly that difficult balance that he and his predecessors have consistently sought to strike?

**Matt Hancock:** That is right—as well as always facing the challenges that are in front of us now. The idea that we should put at risk hundreds more local newspapers, over and above the 200 that have shut since 2005, is anathema to me, because it is so important that our local press is supported. People who support the implementation of section 40 support ending the ability of the local press to investigate people locally and, ultimately, are undermining those businesses.

**Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): If the allegations by John Ford are proved to be true, it means not only that there has been a serious abuse of power by major newspapers for over a decade, but that John Witherow—then the editor of *The Sunday Times*, and now the editor of *The Times*—was only partially truthful in his evidence to the Leveson inquiry. How will the Secretary of State ensure that the full truth is finally revealed?

**Matt Hancock:** As the hon. Lady knows, if the allegations are to be investigated, that is a matter for the police. They will therefore look into these allegations, and that is the right place for that to happen.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I should declare that among the allegations printed in *The Guardian*, it is alleged that Mr Ford worked for *The Telegraph*, my former employer. Is it not itself a demonstration of how much the culture has changed that our newspapers are reporting on these historical allegations and, furthermore, that we have a regulator that provides the low-cost arbitration that would give victims the redress the Opposition claim they need so desperately?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is spot-on. There is a group of people in this House right now who are interested in the past, and there is a group interested in the future, and I am firmly interested in making sure we have decent, high-quality journalism for the future.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The Father of the House is completely right that the press would not allow other institutions or organisations to be judged against such a low bar. Why is the Secretary of State satisfied that the press are not being judged against the sort of bar that they would judge other people against?

**Matt Hancock:** These are allegations of criminal behaviour that are printed in a newspaper—a newspaper that supported the approach we took on Thursday—so they are being printed in the media and discussed in this House. Allegations of criminal behaviour should of course be dealt with properly by the police in the normal way.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Leveson 2 would not only be very costly and lengthy, but might undermine the freedom of our press, be disproportionate and, given that newspapers' circulation has been declining while digital media consumption has been increasing, be too narrow?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is quite right: we have to make sure that we have in place vibrant high-quality journalism and a free press that can hold the powerful to account. Some people may not like that, but it is an incredibly important part of having high-quality political discourse and, ultimately, liberal democracy as we know it. That is what we are focused on.

My hon. Friend mentions the costs, which I had not even come on to. The potential cost of another Leveson inquiry is estimated to be about £5 million. I think that that is money better spent ensuring there is a sustainable future for high-quality journalism.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State says it is not desirable to look at the events of the past because the Department is focusing its efforts on fake news and clickbait. Why can we not do both?

**Matt Hancock:** We have already had a full investigation, through Leveson, of what happened. The question now is what we do next.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Not only is the Secretary of State's fig-leaf excuse that the world has changed wrong, but it ignores the fact that the delay in part 2 was always built into the inquiry to allow police investigations to take place. *The Sunday Times* revelations show that evidence is there to be investigated. Does not his wilful refusal to allow the inquiry to proceed just make it look as though he and the media have something to hide?

**Matt Hancock:** No. The hon. Gentleman says that this morning's evidence shows that there needs to be further investigation. This is of course why we have the police to investigate and, if necessary, the courts to ensure that justice is done.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The Secretary of State stated at the start that policy must "be based on all available information", but how can that possibly happen if there is no second stage of the inquiry, as has been recommended, so will he stop contradicting himself and get on with the job?

**Matt Hancock:** It is very hard to add anything more to the fact that there will be an investigation if the police deem the allegations of what appears to be criminal behaviour to be criminal behaviour. The point is that that is a matter for the police in this country, not for Ministers.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): The Secretary of State talks about these being historical events, but of course the victims of the latest hack found out about it only yesterday, and may not even know about it at the moment, so that is not very

historical. Sir Brian Leveson wrote a letter to the Secretary of State saying that matters had not yet been fully considered and that we needed the second part of the inquiry. Why does he think he knows better than Sir Brian Leveson?

**Matt Hancock:** I have of course considered all the relevant evidence, including the representations from Sir Brian, and my judgment is that we need to concentrate on making sure we have sustainable, high-quality journalism in the future. The hon. Gentleman says that these matters are current, not historical, but the activities alleged in newspapers and by the BBC this morning are ones that they say ended in 2010, which means they are indeed historical.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State not understand why I and my colleagues find it slightly odd that he should decline an inquiry on the basis that these things happened before 2010? By that logic, we would never have had the Iraq inquiry, the child abuse inquiry or the Bloody Sunday inquiry. By definition, inquiries examine events that have happened in the past.

**Matt Hancock:** We have had an inquiry that investigated what happened in the past. It cost millions of pounds: a total of £48 million was spent, including on the police investigations. There were three separate police investigations and over 40 convictions. The issue of the gentleman mentioned this morning was raised in the Leveson inquiry. The idea that we need to have a new inquiry is actually undermined by today's revelations, rather than supported. What matters is that we look forward to making sure that we have high-quality journalism and sustainable business models for it in the future.

## Points of Order

1.58 pm

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I will come to the hon. Gentleman, but I have another point of order first.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In an oral statement on social care on 7 December 2017, the then care Minister, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price)—as it happens, she is in her place on the Front Bench at the moment—replied to a question I asked about the Government abandoning the carers strategy, which had been due to be published in summer 2017. Of the thousands of carers who had responded to a consultation and then been left waiting, the Minister said:

“We have listened to them, and we will consider what they have said in bringing forward the Green Paper. In the meantime, it is very important to pull together exactly what support there is at present and then respond to that, and we will publish our action plan in January.”—[*Official Report*, 7 December 2017; Vol. 632, c. 1238-39.]

It is now March, and this is the second time I have raised this on a point of order. Not only do we no longer have any prospect of a carers strategy from the Government, but they have not met their own target to publish an action plan. That is a shabby way to treat carers. Mr Speaker, have you had any indication that the current Minister for Care or, indeed, any Health Minister plans to come to the House to update us on what, if anything, the Government propose to do for carers?

**Mr Speaker:** I have certainly not been advised of any intention on the part of a Minister to make an oral or, indeed, written statement to the House. There is a Health Minister on the Treasury Bench, who has heard what the hon. Lady said. She is welcome to respond if she wishes, but is under no obligation to do so.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price)** *indicated dissent*.

**Mr Speaker:** Not at this time. I say to the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), who is an experienced denizen of the House, that there will be opportunities through the business question and subsequently for her to draw the attention of the House again, and perhaps in more detail, to her concerns and to elicit a ministerial reply.

**Paul Farrelly:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask your advice on how the House can put on the record its concern that the Conservative manifesto in 2017, with its promise to scrap Leveson 2 and section 40, pre-empted the results of a consultation that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport was carrying out. How can we be sure, particularly given the comments of Sir Brian Leveson, that that decision was reached fairly and reasonably and will not be subject to judicial review?

**Mr Speaker:** I will say two things in response to the hon. Gentleman. First, he seeks and perhaps over-generously expects from me a degree of reassurance and

even of wisdom that it is not within the capacity of the Chair to provide. Secondly, in asking how we—meaning the House as a whole—can be sure, I simply say that the hon. Gentleman, who is no stranger to these matters, raises something of a philosophical question. Whether, when and to what degree Members can be confident of certainty are not matters that can be broached now from the Chair. However, in so far as he was seeking—as the puckish grin on his face suggests—to register his own concerns, he has found his own salvation.

**Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At Prime Minister’s Question Time on 31 January, I asked for a meeting with a Minister and was promised that I could have one. I received a letter two or three weeks ago saying that the matter had been passed to the Department of Health and Social Care. I seek your guidance—or anyone’s guidance, really—on how I can progress that, because I have had no meeting and no date so far. That was five weeks ago, so I think I have been fairly patient.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady has certainly been patient. Sometimes, raising a point of order in the Chamber and reminding those on the Treasury Bench of a promised meeting that has not yet been delivered can be a remarkably effective way of bringing about said meeting. The other device that I recommend to the hon. Lady, who is a new Member of the House, is the tabling of a written question. If she is interested in exploring historic copies of the *Official Report*, she will know that the former Member for Manchester, Gorton, our late and dear friend Sir Gerald Kaufman, was fond of highlighting unanswered correspondence to which he demanded a reply, unanswered questions to which he demanded a reply, or undelivered meetings that he had been promised and on which he still insisted by tabling written questions to remind Ministers of those matters and inquire when the promised reply or meeting would take place. In my experience, Sir Gerald was remarkably effective at obtaining such responses, as indeed was the former Member for Walsall North, Mr David Winnick. The hon. Lady may usefully learn from their and many other examples.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In January, the Government announced plans to incentivise local communities to agree to explore the possibility of storing radioactive nuclear waste near their homes—an initiative that was widely reported in the media. I was anxious that it could revive proposals to store nuclear waste in the anhydrite mine under thousands of homes in Billingham in my constituency. I raised the issue at Prime Minister’s questions on 31 January. Sadly, the Prime Minister’s substitute that day, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, despite the publicity and it being Government policy, knew nothing about that initiative by his Government. However, he promised to investigate the matter and write to me. That was five weeks ago. Will you advise me whether it is unreasonable of me to have expected an answer by now?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his courtesy in giving me notice of it. It is not unreasonable for an hon. Member to expect a response from Ministers within five weeks. Ministerial correspondence is of course, as colleagues

[Mr Speaker]

will know, the responsibility of the Minister concerned. The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), who happens to be my constituency neighbour, is normally most courteous. I am sure that his colleagues on the Treasury Bench, including the representatives of the Patronage Secretary, will swiftly alert the right hon. Gentleman to this outstanding action. The hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) certainly should have had a reply and he should now get one, sooner rather than later. Meanwhile, he has placed his concern on the record.

## Local Health Scrutiny

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

2.5 pm

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about health scrutiny by local authorities, including scrutiny of clinical commissioning groups' decisions; and for connected purposes.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced radical changes to the way in which healthcare was organised. Gone were the days of large primary care trusts and regional health authorities, and in came smaller, more focused, doctor-led clinical commissioning groups and, with each clinical commissioning group, a so-called accountable officer.

There are 207 CCGs in England. They are responsible for two thirds of all NHS spending, controlling £73.6 billion of taxpayers' money. Decisions taken by CCGs affect elective hospital services, emergency and urgent care, community care and mental health support services. The principle of clinical commissioning groups—ensuring that the health services in our communities reflect the needs of our communities—is, on the face of it, sensible. However, as with all providers of public services and spenders of public money, they should be accountable to the public they seek to serve and the decisions they make should be available for public scrutiny. That is what the Bill seeks to achieve.

The present system of public scrutiny for decisions by clinical commissioning groups is opaque, cumbersome and impenetrable to most. It is all bound up in regulation 23(9) of the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013, which sets out that local authorities can refer decisions of clinical commissioning groups to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care where they believe that proper consultation on a service has not taken place or where they consider that

“the proposal would not be in the interests of the health service in its area.”

This all sounds very good, but in reality it is a “take it or leave it” scenario. Local authorities and their elected membership are not empowered to do anything other than accept a decision or escalate it straight to the Secretary of State. That binary approach does not make for good scrutiny, nor does it allow councillors and local authorities to be involved in helping CCGs to make better long-term decisions.

That is not the only flaw in the current scrutiny system. Should a local authority make a referral to the Secretary of State, it is immediately referred to the Independent Reconfiguration Panel. However, since 2013 only 18 referrals have been received. The last four referrals, which were from Thurrock, Cumbria, the East Riding of Yorkshire and my own city of Stoke-on-Trent, saw almost a year pass between the referral to the Secretary of State being received and the report from the Independent Reconfiguration Panel being published. I am sure we would all agree that that is a totally unacceptable wait, during which clinical commissioning groups are free to implement the decision they have

taken despite it being subject to a referral. I do not believe anyone would see that scrutiny process as fair or robust.

The Bill seeks to impose a 45-day time limit between a referral being received by the Secretary of State and the Independent Reconfiguration Panel making a report. Crucially, it also seeks to put any decision referred to the Secretary of State on hold until such time as the Independent Reconfiguration Panel has made its deliberations. The Bill would go further by granting local authorities a new power to call in decisions of CCGs to their local health scrutiny committee and to compel accountable officers to properly consider the views of councillors before progressing with decisions. That would be no different from the mechanisms councils already have to challenge decisions regarding public health, which have been a function of local government since 2013.

Nowhere would that new power have been more welcome than in my own city of Stoke-on-Trent. For over two years now, the north Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent CCGs have been pursuing a flawed and deeply unpopular plan for decommissioning and closing community care beds. Beds in Longton Cottage Hospital, Bradwell Hospital, Leek Moorlands Hospital, Cheadle Hospital and Haywood Hospital have all been lost—more than 200 in total. A referral to the Secretary of State of the disastrous “My Care, My Way, Home First” plan, dreamt up by the accountable officer, Marcus Warnes, was proposed by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, but the referral took almost a year to be considered. I want to thank city councillor Joan Bell and county councillors Dave Jones and Charlotte Atkins, formerly of this place, for their help in achieving those referrals from the county and city councils.

During that year-long wait, however, Marcus Warnes carried on implementing the plan and closing much-needed community care beds. When the final report came back from the independent reconfiguration panel, it was scathing about the process. It said:

“The bed modelling presented in September 2015 has proved entirely incorrect and misleading.”

It also said:

“The circumstances of the NHS’s original decision not to consult about the closure of the Longton Hospital beds are unclear.”

The reconfiguration panel also said of Marcus Warnes’ consultation:

“It did not include any meaningful reference to the impact on community beds and hospitals.”

Frankly, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you or I, or for that matter any local councillor, was the subject of a report suggesting we had misled the public in the way we spent taxpayers’ money, we would be out of a job. I see no reason why Marcus Warnes should be any different. Rather than lose his job, however, he was appointed, against the wishes of the local authorities, as the single accountable officer for the whole of Staffordshire: a huge amount of power concentrated into an entirely unaccountable individual. In Staffordshire’s case, absolute power is leading to absolute chaos. Last week, 150 members of the Staffordshire “Care for All” campaign, led by Andy Day of the North Staffordshire Pensioners’ Convention, came to Parliament to press their case against community bed closures, because they do not have faith that the current scrutiny system is working.

That is just one example from Staffordshire, but there are many more, such as the botched privatisation of council care programmes and the CCG continuing to fine our local hospital millions of pounds for missed targets. Away from Stoke-on-Trent, there are other examples. My hon. Friend the shadow Health Secretary exposed last week how 44 CCGs were paying GPs a bonus not to refer people to hospital. That is an example of CCGs implementing dangerous policies on the NHS without proper scrutiny or public support. Cash incentives based on how many referrals GPs make should have no place in patient care and should never be used.

Such practices should be blocked, and that is why the Bill is necessary. It will provide local accountability for the decisions that are taken by CCGs. It will provide new scrutiny powers to democratically elected councillors to rein in unaccountable CCG chief officers. It will ensure that local NHS services are scrutinised in the same way as council-provided public health services. The Bill will come too late to challenge the decisions in north Staffordshire or to support the 17 referrals that came before it, but it could help to ensure that future decisions by all CCGs are genuinely in the interests of the communities they are there to serve. There is still a lot more to do to return genuine accountability to the NHS, but the Bill would be a start.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Gareth Snell, Layla Moran, Jack Brereton, Jeremy Lefroy, Diana Johnson, Rosie Cooper, Mike Gapes and Ruth Smeeth present the Bill.

Gareth Snell accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 July, and to be printed ( Bill 178 ).*

# Opposition Day

[UN-ALLOTTED DAY]

## European Union Citizenship

2.15 pm

**Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC):** I beg to move,

That this House supports the maintenance of European Union citizenship rights for Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish and English citizens; notes that the range of rights and protections afforded to individuals as European Union citizens are integral to a person's European identity; further notes that many of those rights are closely linked to the UK's membership of the Single Market; and calls on the UK Government to ensure that the UK's membership of the Single Market and UK citizens' right to European Union citizenship are retained in the event that the UK leaves the EU.

Before I begin, may I apologise to the House? I have a very bad head cold that has rendered me slightly deaf, although that is perhaps no great disadvantage in this place. I caution any Member who intervenes that I might have some difficulty hearing them.

Our motion calls for UK nationals to retain European citizenship after we leave the European Union. The key word here is "retain": we wish to retain what we already have. It is supported by a wide range of organisations and individuals: the Scottish National party, the Liberal Democrats, the Green party, Open Britain, Best for Britain, the European Movement, *The New European*, Cymru Dros Ewrop—Wales for Europe, New Europeans, Our Future Our Choice, Brand EU, UKtoStay.EU and Another Europe is Possible, as well as Jo Maugham, QC, of the Good Law Project, and Professor Volker Roeben and Dr Pedro Telles, two of the authors of a report on EU citizenship commissioned by my good friend Jill Evans, the Plaid Cymru MEP. Since the referendum, they have been arguing consistently for the retention of EU citizenship, and I recommend the report to anyone who wishes to pursue this argument. To the relief of hard-pressed Members, I can say that the executive summary is very good.

The crux of our argument is that although we are leaving the EU, the European citizenship rights conferred on UK citizens are not extinguished. Although we are leaving, those rights persist. Continuing Union citizenship is the more convincing interpretation of European and international law. Indeed, the principle that although a treaty might be bought to an end, the rights conferred by it are not extinguished, is enshrined strongly in international law. I refer Members to the 1969 Vienna convention on the law of treaties, which will be binding on member states, the UK and the EU itself post Brexit. Article 70(1)(b) of that convention provides that "legal situations" created during the currency of the treaties continue after withdrawal.

As Professor Roeben et al say on page five of the report:

"This interpretation of the Convention, that ongoing situations and rights continue, is supported by the overriding objective of ensuring legal certainty and preventing withdrawals from treaties having any retroactive effect. It is also supported by state practice." That is a crucial aspect of international law. Governments withdrawing from treaties cannot just abandon the rights their citizens already have. Professor Roeben tells me, by the way, that this article, as with much international law, was drawn up with the prominent participation of British legal experts.

There is an alternative reading that article 50 extinguishes all rights of the individual created by the founding treaties. In that case, both EU and international law would demand that a treaty be negotiated on associate Union citizenship, bringing with it a bundle of rights that might be little different from those that come with full citizenship. One way or other, we believe that EU citizenship of a sort is required.

The EU could legislate on citizenship post Brexit. That legislation would protect UK nationals in the EU, but would have no binding effect on the UK—by definition, because we would have left. We therefore urge the Government to look to achieving continuity and associate citizenship through the withdrawal agreement. That is why today's debate is particularly timely.

The report concludes that neither continuity nor associate citizenship would require any revision of the founding treaties. There is a great deal more detail in the report that I will not go into today, but it will become pertinent if the Government recognise the force of our argument and proceed as we recommend. For now, I wish to set the context for our party's position and say plainly from the start that Plaid Cymru campaigned to stay in the European Union. This was consistent with our long-term pro-European policy—indeed, that has been our policy since our establishment in 1925.

We have always been aware of our European history and our nation's European heritage and have set great store by it. That has influenced our party profoundly. Our long-time president, Gwynfor Evans, who was the Member for Carmarthen, would rarely miss the opportunity to remind the people of Wales of our European heritage and our 1,500-year history as a people with our own language and culture, from our immediate post-Roman beginnings onwards to the present day. In fact, his conference speeches would often consist of retelling our history. I am reminded of a small joke made by two valleys members during one of Gwynfor's speeches. One said to the other, "Good God, this is 20 minutes in and we are only in the 9th century!"

**Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC):** My hon. Friend is making his usual excellent case when he leads these debates. We could go even further back to Saunders Lewis, who was the president before Gwynfor Evans. Saunders saw our European heritage as vital to his vision for Wales for the future, partly driven by his time in the trenches in the first world war and his desire not to see another generation of Welshmen die in the fields of foreign lands.

**Hywel Williams:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I was going to refer later to the fact that the European Union has helped largely to prevent war on the European continents, although there are obvious exceptions, such as in the former Yugoslavia, which was not a member of the EU. He makes a pertinent point about Saunders Lewis, who had that profound experience in the trenches. It was one reason why he and his friends set up Plaid Cymru in August 1925 in my home town of Preseli, at a meeting of the Eisteddfod. While I am on my feet, I might as well also say that our profound lack of political realism at that time meant that in a country that was almost exclusively non-conformist, teetotal and in favour of the British empire, we had as our president a Francophile, wine-drinking Catholic—I think

Machiavelli is still rotating in his grave after that one, but there we are. The roots of our pro-European stance are very deep indeed.

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): Given that the hon. Gentleman's party exists for the fundamental purpose of trying to remove British citizenship from the people of Wales—something that is of significantly more importance to them than their European identity—is his argument not a bit inconsistent?

**Hywel Williams:** I can only say, frankly, that my ambition and that of my hon. Friends is to ensure that Wales has an independent future. That may mean that we are reconciled to a British identity as a multiple identity for now, and hon. Members will know all about this—one can allegedly be Welsh and British, which is an argument that I hear from Members on both sides of the House, or Welsh and European, which is our argument. I certainly feel Welsh and European.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): This goes to the crux of the argument. We are talking about our rights as individuals and the identity of individuals. I speak as a Londoner born and bred. I live in Wales and I claim Welsh nationality, and I am also proud of being European, but our rights as individuals are under threat. That is the point we have brought to the Chamber.

**Hywel Williams:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I was going to go on to say that this is more than just a matter of self-ascribed identity. It is about the real practical matters of the rights to travel and work—the European rights that have benefited people in Wales and throughout the UK. There is an argument about identity, and I will talk about that in a moment, but I do not think that it has the force that the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) seemed to imply.

I was talking about Gwynfor Evans, who would often remind us of three pillars of Owain Glyndŵr's policy during the 15th-century war of independence, as related to the King of France in the Pennal letter, which some people will have seen when it was on a visit to Aberystwyth some years ago. He said to the King of France that one of the central pillars was the need for a direct relationship with Rome for the Church in Wales—it was a very long time ago, and that was important then. It was about a direct relationship with the overarching European institution, rather than an indirect link mediated through Canterbury—some people will hear the echoes of the current situation in that policy.

By the way, the other two pillars of Glyndŵr's policy were for Welsh to be the state language and for two universities to be established at a time when they were first being established across Europe by ambitious leaders. Some 600 years later, we have excellent universities in Wales. We are nearly there on the language issue, but on the European issue we are taking a serious step back.

From the start, my party took inspiration from continental developments of economic and social co-operation, as exemplified in the writings of D. J. Davies. We found European multilingualism far more congenial than the stifling monolingualism of so much of the UK's public life. I say in passing that right hon. and hon. Members may not know that the most recent meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee was held here in Westminster with simultaneous translation. Half those

who spoke did so partly or wholly in Welsh. No one was hurt. Revolution did not break out. *Hansard* published what I think is its very first wholly bilingual record—I should mention that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) spoke in Welsh, and I congratulate him sincerely on his efforts—but that reflection of the actual linguistic condition common in these islands is still very much the remarked-upon exception, rather than the rule. That is not so over much of the rest of our continent.

Turning to present times, given our radical political stance, Plaid Cymru has always supported the growth and development of European policies beyond the narrow confines of the common market, which we initially joined. Ordinary people across the UK have derived so much benefit from those social, workforce and environmental policies, and EU citizenship is, for me, in that category. Importantly for our country, the EU has an overt regional economic cohesion policy, from which Wales has derived substantial additional funding. Of course, it is a cruel irony that we benefit thus only because of our poverty and our economy performing so badly, on a par with regions of the former Soviet bloc at the eastern end of the European Union.

In passing, I must also refer to other EU measures such as Interreg Europe, which promotes inter-regional contact between Wales and Ireland. Wales faces west as well as east, although many people, including Government Ministers, sometimes do not realise that. My colleague, the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), used to say occasionally that Holyhead was east Dublin rather than north-west Anglesey. We have also benefited from the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and the Erasmus programme on student exchange, to name just three from which Wales along with other parts of the UK has benefited, and in respect of which, I say to the Minister, there is much concern, not least at our universities, and I mention my own, Bangor University.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): While the hon. Gentleman is on that subject, does he agree that it would be useful if the Government made an estimate of the amount of money that would have come to Wales from the European regional development fund and the European social fund in the 2021-27 tranche and promised that Wales will still receive the same amount of money or more?

**Hywel Williams:** I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. As with so many things Welsh, we lack the basic statistical information and the basic projections. I know that the Government do not believe in experts, projections and forecasts, but I sometimes wonder on what they do depend. In Rome, they depended on examining the entrails of sacrificed animals—I do not know whether that is what they get up to—but he makes a serious point: if we knew what we were dealing with, we could make the argument more effectively.

**Jonathan Edwards:** I am glad that my hon. Friend mentions Erasmus and Horizon, two schemes whereby the Welsh Government could act bilaterally with the EU. Does he share my concern, arising from my discussions with colleagues in Brussels, that the Scottish Government seem far in advance of the Welsh Government in negotiating with the EU how those schemes could be continued in our respective nations?

**Hywel Williams:** That is a very good point. We have examined the bilateral agreements that other countries have with the EU. The Brexit Select Committee, of which I am a member, recently had the Swiss ambassador to the EU and Swiss experts before it discussing these bilateral agreements, and they are extremely useful for Switzerland; they are less useful, apparently, in the eyes of the EU, but my hon. Friend's point is that other devolved Governments and Administrations have taken these matters further. I sincerely wish that our own Government would do the same.

I am drifting a little from the central question, which is the matter of European citizenship, to which I will now return. Many people listening will be thinking, "Didn't Wales vote to leave the EU—if by a narrow margin?" Like many hon. Members, I continue to receive angry messages from Brexit supporters. The only one repeatable here is: "We're leaving—get on with it." I have a vast collection of others that are slightly less polite. We are indeed leaving—unless, of course, there is a sudden outbreak of common sense on the Government Benches—but it is not as simple as that. We are learning—even the Secretary of State for International Trade, who famously said that negotiating new trade deals with the EU would be the simplest thing in the world, is learning—to our cost that it is not that simple, and today's motion is just one part of our efforts to salvage something from the wreckage of this slow-motion disaster.

For the benefit of my Brexiteering interlocutors, and as a Back-Bench MP responsible to my Arfon constituents, I want to note that all four Plaid Cymru constituencies voted to remain. This is in marked contrast to other Welsh constituencies that share our socioeconomic characteristics—marginalisation, poverty, powerlessness and low wages—but which are represented in this place by parties whose policies on the EU are, at best, a little less clear. Being broadly in favour of the EU, even in our present poor economic condition, is my Arfon constituents' consistent view, as I will illustrate with a couple of points. First, in the 2015 general election, at the peak of UKIP support, 39 of Wales' 40 constituencies swung to UKIP—the exception was Arfon, which swung to Plaid Cymru; and secondly, Arfon, I am proud to say, voted in the referendum to remain in the EU by a margin of 60:40.

We have valued our membership of the EU, including the economic support it has given us, and one aspect of this is valuing our European citizenship. The Welsh philosopher J. R. Jones, writing in the early 1960s and commenting on the then apparent terminal decline of the Welsh language, said something like this—I paraphrase in English for the benefit of the House:

"Leaving your country is a common and sometimes sad experience. But I know of something which is much more heart rending, for you could always return to your native land. And that is, not that you are leaving your country, but rather that your country is leaving you, being finally drawn away into the hands of another people, of another culture."

J. R. Jones and many others inspired the next generation, including me, to campaign for the language, and as a result it is not threatened with extinction, for now at least. His insight is particularly telling today, in that for many, particularly of the younger generation, leaving the EU is just such a heart-rending experience.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): I found that quote particularly moving, having found in my constituency and, indeed, my own family, young people

who know nothing more than being part of the EU. We are taking their identity away from them and, indeed, from ourselves, because for 40 years we have known nothing else than being proud Europeans.

**Hywel Williams:** That is exactly the point I intend to make.

Many young people told me after the referendum that the result had been a profound emotional shock, an assault on the very foundations of their personal identities as Europeans, one telling me that she had been in floods of tears. They told me how they regretted losing key practical rights—this is not just an emotional identity matter—such as the right to travel without hindrance within the EU and the unqualified right to work and to study in other European countries. Today the UK Government have an opportunity to heal some of these divisions—intergenerational divisions and divisions between all peoples of these islands, particularly, as we have heard, in Ireland.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I am sure that my hon. Friend shares my concern that many of these young people now coming of age, who will be most directly affected by our leaving the EU, had no say whatsoever. From year to year, this situation is worsening.

**Hywel Williams:** My hon. Friend makes a telling point to which I will return in a moment and which is covered by the two aspects of citizenship that we are proposing. The first concerns continuing citizenship for those of us who are citizens of the EU now by means of a bilateral treaty. The second concerns those who, being unborn, cannot access that citizenship—this is a matter for our children and our children's children. Particularly acute, however, for me at least, is the position of those aged 14, 15 and 16 who understood the issues in the referendum but were unable to vote. I should say in passing that my party has always been in favour of reducing the voting age to 16, which would have made a considerable difference to the result.

As I said, today the UK Government have an opportunity to heal some of these divisions. This is a positive point from the Plaid Cymru Benches, and I hope that the Government see it in that light. We are calling on them to secure and retain our right to European citizenship and not to take away what is already rightfully ours, so that we might leave the EU with just a little less self-inflicted injury.

We are European citizens, although I have to confess that I am biased: I am married to a European citizen—she is from Llanelli. She likewise is married to a European citizen—I am from Pwllheli. I do not want to labour the point, but we are both Welsh and European. I am therefore biased, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) said, so are our many friends and colleagues who have chosen to live and work in Wales and become Welsh, but not by rejecting their European citizenship or identity. To quote Gwynfor Evans again:

"Anyone can be Welsh, so long as you are prepared to take the consequences."

That is our definition of citizenship. The citizens of Wales are those who are committed. I would commend that as a general definition of civic identity—I suppose I should say "civic nationalism", but perhaps I should let that pass.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and his Plaid Cymru colleagues on securing this debate and I am very much looking forward to giving the Scottish National party's fraternal address to their conference in a couple of weeks. Does he agree that the Welsh nationalism that he and his colleagues espouse is very much like Scottish nationalism, in that it is outward looking and internationalist, and that all that our parties want is for our countries to be nation states with a seat at the top table in the EU, wielding the kind of power that the Republic of Ireland is currently wielding?

**Hywel Williams:** I agree entirely. As I said, my definition of identity, be it Welsh, English, Scottish, Northern Irish or whatever, is that it is self-ascribed—it is something that someone claims. That is why my party has such members as my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, who comes from London—born in Eltham, I think—but is entirely Welsh and Welsh speaking. That is probably a consequence of marrying someone from Blaenau Ffestiniog, where no quarter is given or expected, but the point is that we have people in our party who come from all over the world, and long may that remain the case—we have no exclusive definition.

As I have said, Gwynfor said, a very long time ago:

“Anyone can be Welsh, so long as you are prepared to take the consequences.”

Those consequences, for us as European citizens, are that we have wide rights to travel, live work and study anywhere in the EU. European citizenship also gives us rights under EU law in respect of health, education, work, and social security, as well as the right to be free of discrimination based on nationality—which, I think, is relevant to what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd. The assumption so far on both sides, the EU and the Government, is that EU citizenship will lapse at the point of our exit from the European Union. However, EU citizenship did not replace UK citizenship when it came into force. It is additional: the two continue to co-exist, and leaving the EU does not entail the end of EU citizenship for UK citizens.

Unfortunately, the Government, by default, are intent on taking away something that is of significant value to the people of these islands. They should not do so. In fact, they should make the retention of EU citizenship an important central plank of future negotiations. It is something that we can ask—demand—of the European Union; it is something that it is in its power to give, and something that would be valued by our citizens. It would benefit us all, not least by establishing a common status for all EU citizens who live here, including those with Irish heritage and the 3 million or so people who have moved here from EU member states. It would establish a level playing field.

There was a glimmer of hope last year when, on 2 November, Bloomberg reported the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union as saying that the UK was—in the words of its headline—

“Open to Talking About Associate Citizenship After Brexit”

—which came as a surprise to some people—

and that that would allow “visa-free working rights” to UK nationals. The Secretary of State said:

“We'll listen to anything of this nature. The aim of this exercise is to be good for Europe, good for Britain, and that means good for the citizens of Europe and Britain.”

I also note that the Prime Minister said in her statement on Monday that

“UK and EU citizens will still want to work and study in each other's countries, and we are open to discussions about how to maintain the links between our people.”—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2018; Vol. 637, c. 26.]

Perhaps I am over-interpreting, but that seems to me to be potentially code for associated citizenship. We shall see how things develop, but for me it had the flavour of a “get out of jail free” card.

Today I am arguing for maintaining the status quo. We are European citizens and will continue to be so, but obviously I urge the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister even now to pursue their less ambitious line further. For those who ask for a precedent for EU citizenship—and some have asked me for one—I point to the situation when Ireland became a free state. The UK allowed Irish citizens to retain their UK citizenship then, and indeed, as Brexit problems and contradictions have closed in, the Government—from the Prime Minister down—have been lavish in their praise for the arrangements between the Irish Republic and the UK. That is a model of which they approve.

Earlier, I mentioned people of Irish heritage. It is little remarked upon, but those with a qualifying link with any part of the entire island of Ireland through either family or residence—even a short residence in Northern Ireland—can apply for an Irish passport. That applies to millions of British people, including my neighbour Miss Norah Davies, whose passport application I was happy to sign some weeks ago. Her passport has now arrived, much to her satisfaction. I caution Ministers not to tangle with angry older citizens; they do so at their peril. Norah Davies's link with Ireland through her mother reaches back to the first part of the last century. My link, alas, petered out two generations before hers, and I therefore do not qualify.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): There is a little-known anomaly which I and others have been trying to address, and to which the hon. Gentleman alluded inadvertently a moment ago. When the Irish Republic, or the Irish free state as it was then, left the Commonwealth in 1949, the British Government of the time allowed those who had been born in the Republic and had moved to Northern Ireland or elsewhere in the UK to retain their British citizenship. Nowadays, those who were born in the Republic and live in Northern Ireland cannot obtain British passports, although people who have never been to the Republic can obtain Irish passports. In terms of UK citizenship, those people are still somewhat disadvantaged. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is talking about EU citizenship, but given his allusion, does he agree that that needs to be addressed?

**Hywel Williams:** I must confess that I was entirely unaware of the issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised. If that is indeed the case, I think that it bears more examination, and I should be interested to discuss it with him further.

I was talking about Irish citizens and those of Irish extraction. There is a certain serendipity in the fact that UK-Irish citizens have those rights on the basis of one

[Hywel Williams]

grandparent while the rest of us do not. There will be people like me with British citizenship, people of Irish extraction with Irish citizenship, Irish people with Irish citizenship who live, work and vote here, and EU citizens with a certain status, whatever that may be. There is a certain randomness about the whole arrangement, which would in some respects be addressed by an overarching European citizenship. I fear that that serendipity will inevitably become more pressing when those with the favoured passports join the short queue at holiday airports while their less fortunate neighbours wait in the “others” line. It will have hit us a bit harder by then.

The Government say that they want a close relationship with our EU partners. That is their ambition, cited over and over again. They now have a practical opportunity to support that relationship through continuation citizenship for current British EU citizens, and, for all those who will not be EU citizens at the point of our leaving—that is, the unborn—a future status through associate EU citizenship.

So far the debate has been dominated by trade issues, the divorce bill and the Irish border—those are the issues with which we have been grappling for many months—but many Brexit promises before the referendum had an individualistic quality. People felt that they were being promised something individually. We would be richer and have better services, not least through having an extra £350 million every week to spend on the NHS. Promises such as that persuaded people, along with, of course, the immigration issue.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** We were also promised that we would be freer, with all the implications of independence. We are having to discuss this issue today because we must face the fact that we are unlikely to be so free.

**Hywel Williams:** The paradox has not escaped me.

Here is a chance for the Government to redeem themselves partially by securing for all UK individuals in the future that which they already have: UK and European citizenship. That would be popular. According to research findings published last year by the LSE and Opinium, six out of 10 people want to keep their EU citizenship. Support for retaining rights is particularly strong among 18 to 24-year-olds, 85% of whom want to retain their EU citizenship. They are the generation, more than any other, that will have to deal with the long-term fallout from Brexit over the coming decades, and to deal practically and emotionally with the loss of their firm expectation of continuing EU citizenship. Many members of that generation did not have a vote in the referendum, although they will be profoundly affected by its consequences—unless, of course, the Government take heed of our argument today. Thankfully, it is not my responsibility to drum up support for the Conservatives, but were the Government just to look to their own enlightened self-interest, they would see that at least one path is clear from the debate. If they will not do so, can we at least expect the Labour party to see where its interest lies, to support the motion, and to protect our people’s rights?

I am advised by wiser heads that there would be no new treaty requirements, so now is the time for the Government to give a clear and practical sign that they

are taking UK citizens’ rights seriously—not by withdrawing our rights without our explicit consent, but by securing European Union citizenship for all, not just the random few. What is needed now, and what is currently lacking, is vision and clear political leadership to mend some of the divisions that Brexit has opened up. In the Prime Minister’s own words last Monday,

“let us get on with it.”—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2018; Vol. 637, c. 28.]

2.49 pm

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes):** I thank the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) for his typically thoughtful comments, and also congratulate him on having managed to get through his entire speech with a very difficult throat—which I thought improved as time went on.

I welcome this opportunity to debate the Government’s policy on EU citizenship after the UK leaves the European Union. EU citizens in the UK make a significant contribution to our national life and we want them and their families to stay.

From the very beginning, the Prime Minister has been clear that safeguarding the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and UK nationals living in the EU was her first priority for our negotiations. We have now delivered on that commitment and have reached an agreement with our EU partners on citizens’ rights. The agreement was set out as part of a joint report issued on 8 December; it provides the millions of EU and UK citizens living in the UK and the EU respectively with certainty about their future rights, and, most importantly, allows them and their families to carry on their lives broadly as they do now.

The agreement will protect citizens who have been exercising free movement rights at the time of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. All family members living lawfully with a qualifying citizen at this point are also protected, and close family members can continue to join qualifying citizens on EU law terms after exit. We have agreed with the EU that we will introduce a new settled status scheme under UK law for EU citizens and their family members covered by the agreement. Those who have already had five years of continuous residence in the UK will be eligible to apply for settled status. Others will be able to remain in the UK to build up their five years’ residence.

The scheme, which will open for applications by the end of 2018, is being designed and built from scratch. The application system will be streamlined and user-friendly, and will draw on existing Government data to minimise the burden on applicants to provide evidence. We are engaging with stakeholders who represent EU citizens in the UK, as well as separate diaspora groups in the UK, to discuss and understand their needs for the settlement scheme. I thank those who have already participated and shown willingness to engage, particularly the EU ambassadors who have beaten a path to my door to explain how they can assist. Our next priority is to turn the December agreement into binding legal text for the withdrawal agreement.

**Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP):** I thank the Minister for what she said on EU nationals. However, in common with many other Members, I have had a large number of EU nationals approach me who are

worried about certainty. I have the military base of Leuchars in my constituency and those who have German wives, for instance, still do not have certainty. I know the Minister might not be able to answer this today, but please will she look into that, particularly for military families?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, particularly for military families, who move around a great deal and for whom it might be harder to demonstrate living in one particular place. We are determined to make sure this scheme has a default position of accepting that people are EU citizens living here, and we want there to be a default “Yes” for settled status, and certainly not a default “No.”

We have been clear that we will seek to agree an implementation period beyond March 2019 of around two years. The purpose of such a period is to give people, business and indeed our own public services in the UK and across the EU the time they need to put in place the new arrangements that will be required to adjust to our future partnership. It will take time to implement a new immigration framework.

**Jonathan Edwards:** I fear the Minister might have misunderstood the topic for debate. We are aiming to discuss the issue of the European citizenship of UK subjects, as opposed to the rights of EU citizens.

**Caroline Nokes:** I am going to move on to the points the hon. Member for Arfon made, and perhaps the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) will indulge me by allowing me to get there.

As I was about to say, during the implementation period, which will be time-limited, people will be able to come to the UK to live and work as they do now, and this will be reciprocal, meaning UK nationals will also be able to travel to live and work in the EU.

Last week, the Home Secretary published a position paper setting out that EU citizens arriving during the implementation period should be able to work towards settlement in the UK. People arriving during this period should not have the same expectations as those who arrived during our membership of the EU, but it is right that we set out the rules that will apply to these individuals when this period ends, to provide them with the certainty they need. These rights will be enforceable in UK law, and we will not seek to include them in the withdrawal agreement; however, we will discuss this with the Commission in the coming weeks.

Turning more broadly to the question of EU citizenship, the Government have been clear that our membership of the EU will end on 29 March 2019. We are content to listen to proposals from the EU on associate citizenship for UK nationals. However, to date this has not been formally proposed to the UK in the negotiations. EU treaty provisions state that only citizens of EU member states are able to hold EU citizenship. Therefore, when the UK ceases to be a member of the European Union, UK nationals will no longer hold EU citizenship unless they hold dual nationality with another member state.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** Does the right hon. Lady not agree that we are talking about an interpretation of the law as it stands and a matter of political will? We would

be begging the Government to bring this matter, as the right of individual citizens of the United Kingdom, into negotiations as we move forward with Brexit?

**Caroline Nokes:** As I said just a moment ago, the Government position is that we are very happy to discuss this specific issue, but we must do so reflecting on the law as it currently stands, and the position in law is very clear: once we have left the EU, citizens living here will no longer be resident in an EU member state.

The Prime Minister has been clear, and she reinforced this message in her speech on Friday, that we are seeking the broadest and deepest possible future partnership with the EU, and that a key part of that is maintaining the links between our people. We are clear that, as we leave the EU, free movement of people will come to an end and we will control the number of people who come to live in our country, but UK citizens will still want to work and study in EU countries, just as EU citizens will want to do the same here, which is why the Prime Minister is putting the interests of EU and UK citizens at the heart of her approach, and we are open to discussing how to facilitate these valuable links.

2.57 pm

**Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab):** First, may I put on record my thanks to the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) for the considered way in which he opened the debate? I also wish him a speedy recovery from the heavy cold he has been suffering from, and congratulate him on getting to the end of his speech.

I listened carefully to what the Minister said, but I am afraid that the weakness at the heart of the Government’s position—whether on EU citizenship in the future, the rights of EU citizens in this country, or indeed immigration more generally—is the failure of the Government to bring proposed legislation before this House. I start with the immigration Bill which was originally scheduled to be published last summer. The Home Secretary said last October to the House and the Home Affairs Committee that there would be an immigration White Paper by the end of last year and a Bill early this year. The then immigration Minister—not the right hon. Lady, but her predecessor the right hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis)—told the Committee in November that a White Paper would be produced soon. The right hon. Lady told this House on 5 February that there would be a White Paper “when the time is right”.—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2018; Vol. 635, c. 1211.]

She then said on 26 February that there would be a White Paper in due course. That is simply not good enough to deal with an issue of this seriousness.

Words are very important, not just the various contorted phrases the Government have used to justify their inaction, but also remarks made about the status of our existing EU citizens, and the reported comments of the International Trade Secretary that the

“uncertain status of EU nationals living in the UK is ‘one of our main cards’ in the Brexit negotiations.”

That is a matter of great regret.

**Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab):** Does my hon. Friend agree that many companies rely on their employees travelling, often at very short notice? I am thinking of Airbus—a certain number of people from this country

[Mark Tami]

will just hop on a plane to Toulouse or Bremen to finish the work if a wing is not finished. Things like that need to be considered owing to the potential effect on future investment choices that such companies will make.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It comes as no surprise that the deputy director general of the CBI, no less, has said of this Tory Government that he is “hugely frustrated” by their lack of progress on an immigration Bill.

EU citizens are our friends, our colleagues and our neighbours. They are people on whose doors we knocked in the general election last year. When people are making a positive contribution to our economy, our national health service, which already has issues with recruitment, social care, our universities and other sectors, the Government’s continuing failure to legislate only highlights the fact that they could have done so much unilaterally a long time ago. The Minister referred to the phase 1 agreement, which I have in front of me, and the continuing uncertainty mentioned by the hon. Member for Arfon remains an issue. Paragraph 34 of the agreement is clear:

“Both Parties agree that the Withdrawal Agreement should provide for the legal effects of the citizens’ rights Part both in the UK and in the Union. UK domestic legislation should also be enacted to this effect.”

Where is the legislation? It should be brought forward as soon as possible.

We now know that nothing will be agreed in the negotiations until everything is agreed. We also know, because the Immigration Minister told the House a few weeks ago, that the Migration Advisory Committee has been asked

“to advise on the economic aspects of the UK’s exit”

by September, and I see that the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), is nodding. The Immigration Minister then said that there was

“plenty of time to take account of the MAC’s recommendations in designing the longer-term immigration system for the UK.”—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2018; Vol. 635, c. 1212.]

She says “plenty of time” but this is a two-year Parliament, and she has until March 2019 to get legislation on the statute book. Time is of the essence. If I take the Minister at her word that we will have the legislation when the time is right, may I gently suggest that that time might be now? She attends the Cabinet in her role as Immigration Minister, and she needs to persuade the Cabinet to give her the time to bring the legislation before this House. While it is my view and that of the Opposition that the status of EU nationals in this country should have been dealt with unilaterally a long time ago, not left subject to negotiation in this way—nor should there ever have been the reported comments of the International Trade Secretary that people be used as bargaining chips—the Minister could act now, and act she should.

I welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for Arfon, and the Minister said that it would be considered, and we must be careful about not excluding options from the table as we go forward. None the less, I suggest to the Minister, as she tries to put together the whole gamut of immigration policy for this country post-Brexit,

that in order to achieve a fair, managed and efficient policy she must look at this country’s economic needs and work with business and the trade unions.

**Jonathan Edwards:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I congratulate him on his speech. However, would it be Labour party policy to support our proposal for associate citizenship?

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I have just said that we should not take any options off the table. I always welcome contributions from the hon. Gentleman, and I look forward to the Government’s response—[*Interruption.*] I will certainly give the hon. Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) my position on a number of matters in a moment, but let me make another point first.

Perhaps the Tory party could repair its relationship with the CBI if it properly consulted business and the unions about our future immigration system. It could end the years of exploitation of migrant workers, which it has done so little about, increase the number of prosecutions for breaches of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, which have been going on for far too long, reinstate the migrant impact fund, remove international students from the statistics and, perhaps above all, move away from this obsession with bogus immigration targets. The Tories have never achieved their numerical target, despite having promised it over three general elections.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I have much sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman has to say, but it does not relate to the motion, which is about the future rights of UK citizens. There is an interesting discussion to be had about the rights of EU citizens coming into the UK, but that is for another debate.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I have responded to the point made from the hon. Member for Arfon about that. I appreciate the narrow point about UK citizens going forward, but this is a broad debate and I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want to lose the opportunity to put such matters to the Minister, as I am seeking to do.

I conclude by saying that an unconditional commitment on the rights of EU citizens in this country could have been made already. It can still be offered, and the Government should move away from their obsession with numbers and restore confidence in our immigration system.

3.6 pm

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called so early in this debate and to be given a window into the world of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). It is a privilege, and I am enjoying it very much. The hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) opened this debate by saying that his party has been shaped by the issue of Europe, and I say to him that it takes one to know one. The Conservative party has also been shaped by Europe, and my constituency has perhaps been shaped to a greater extent by Europe than almost any other.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman focus not on EU citizens’ rights in this country, but on the reciprocal rights for UK citizens. However, I am afraid that I will

disappoint him to some extent, as others have, by focusing on the rights of EU citizens, although not entirely, because it is only fair to rebut some of what has been said recently. The Government brought in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to combat some of the issues that have just been talked about, and we brought in the controlling migration fund at triple the level of the migration impact fund that was praised by the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds). We should therefore not be ashamed of what we have achieved for the rights of migrant workers.

I should acknowledge the thoughtful issues of identity that the hon. Member for Arfon opened the debate with, because although my constituency may indeed have voted to leave the European Union more resoundingly than any other, it has to some extent been shaped by citizens of the European Union perhaps more than anywhere else. We have streets in Boston that are populated with shops that would otherwise be empty and are entirely focused on our new eastern European communities. That means that we are uniquely attuned to the issues of identity that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Let us think about why a constituency like mine voted so strongly. It was not a rejection of those EU rights nor of EU citizens as individuals. I do not wish to re-run the referendum again—not least because I was on a different side from my constituents—but it was not a rejection of those individuals. It was a rejection of a migration policy that had not worked for a constituency such as mine and of an approach that had been taken, in the minds of many of my constituents, by Brussels over many years that did not reflect the best interests of the United Kingdom as a whole.

When the hon. Gentleman talks about identity, I hope he bears it in mind that far more of my constituents have married into the communities that have arrived than is the case elsewhere. They have often formed relationships and have children in school—schools where pupils have one parent from England and one from a European Union country. That sense of identity is uniquely altered by the migration policy he talks about, and it means that my constituents have, if not a unique, perhaps a greater desire than others to be able to visit Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and all those countries with which we benefit from reciprocal rights.

None of my voters voted for British driving licences to no longer be valid on the continent or for us no longer to have the reciprocal rights we have enjoyed for so long. We, as a country, have had a full and blossoming relationship with Europe, and we would all acknowledge it is in the interests of both Europe and the UK to secure many of those things for the future. We should pay tribute to the negotiating position the Prime Minister set out last week in a pragmatic, sensible bid to try to secure some of the rights that the hon. Gentleman talked about.

We should also acknowledge that people voted in the referendum for a different set of circumstances after we leave, which inevitably means that we have to consider what those differences might look like. The Minister is right to say that the starting point has to be that we will no longer have precisely those rights in law when we leave. It is in tune with the Prime Minister's pragmatic approach to say that we have to acknowledge that that is the case, and we have to ensure that we get the best possible outcome at the end of these negotiations.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** The hon. Gentleman talks about people's view that there would be changed circumstances. Given the votes in a plethora of nation states within the EU, not least in Italy at the weekend, who knows what changes will come in the very institution we are talking about? Does he agree that in future the EU might not be as people envisage it at the moment?

**Matt Warman:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that this is a moveable feast on the other side of the channel, and we should bear that in mind.

**Jonathan Edwards:** The hon. Gentleman raises a point made by the Minister, on whom I wished to intervene. He will be aware of the Vienna convention on the law of treaties and that, under that legal ruling, citizens' rights may not be lost. Surely that is the legal precedent we should be following.

**Matt Warman:** The hon. Gentleman uses the word "may," and we should be looking at what the options are and at what the precedents may be. The Minister is right to say that we will no longer be members when we leave, and therefore we will no longer have the rights we currently have. The hon. Gentleman may pray in aid precedents that suggest something else, and we may be able to rely on some of those precedents in due course. We should not prejudice any of that, and we have to be pragmatic in where we start.

It is also worth bearing it in mind that people across my constituency and across the country voted for precisely those kinds of differences. They voted for the Government to negotiate a new relationship with Europe, which is precisely what we are doing.

One aspect of the motion on which the hon. Member for Arfon did not particularly dwell is single market access, which defines a huge part of our relationship with the EU. This is not a fault that he committed, but it is a frustrating and patronising element of some aspects of this debate to say that people did not know what they were voting for when they voted in the referendum. My constituents were very clear that they were voting to leave the single market because they were voting to strike our own trade deals with other countries across the world and to open up new opportunities. We should not allow ourselves to pretend there was not a full and frank debate about what leaving the European Union might mean before people went into the polling booths.

A crucial part of the motion implies there are not the opportunities outside the EU that people voted for. The hon. Gentleman frames it as though all we will be doing is losing rights when we leave the European Union. We should, of course, bear it in mind that there will be a different relationship, but there are opportunities out there, too. Part of the Prime Minister's positive approach is to say that there are opportunities that we must seize and that there is another side to the coin—that not everyone can have every single thing they might wish for.

The hon. Gentleman proposed that we could stay in the single market and retain all our rights as they are today. My response to him is that he should not be wilfully blind to the opportunities. I think we will get a good deal with the European Union that allows us to retain many of the benefits we see today, but we will also have access to a wider world out there in a very different way. That is not to say that it will all be a bed

[*Matt Warman*]

of roses and that it will be the easiest thing we could ever do, but he should acknowledge the other side of the coin.

**Hywel Williams:** I am an optimist by nature, but how does the hon. Gentleman respond to the observation last week that we are exchanging a three-course meal for the promise of a bag of crisps?

**Matt Warman:** I do not want to say that we can have our cake and eat it, but we can have a three-course meal and a bag of crisps. It is always tempting for one side of the argument to say it will all be brilliant and for the other side of the argument to say it will all be terrible. The reality is that, neither at this time of day nor at any other, I do not much fancy a three-course meal and a bag of crisps at the same moment, but there is a compromise somewhere in the middle, which is what we will be seeking.

Whether we represent constituencies such as mine or constituencies with far lower levels of migration, we have all heard the huge concern among EU citizens living in this country about what their status might be. We should accept it is the genuine and proven intention of the Prime Minister to seek to provide reassurance as soon as possible in the debate, but we should also bear it in mind—I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for not doing this at he opened the debate—that the more we talk about those concerns, the more we fall into the trap of whipping up those concerns and the more we worry people who should not be worried. It is not only unfair on them, but it is irresponsible of us if we do that.

A number of constituents have come to tell me they are concerned both that they might not be able to travel as easily to the home country of their boyfriend or girlfriend, or that they may not be able to stay in this country. I have been pleased to be able to provide them with some reassurance, but I have not had tens of thousands of people coming to me to make that point because I have not stirred up such feelings. I am pleased the hon. Gentleman did not do so in his speech, although not so pleased that I will be supporting the motion today.

This has been a uniquely thoughtful debate, notwithstanding my own contribution, and it is a pleasure to be part of a debate on Brexit that is not as high octane and unhelpful as some we have seen, and that has not produced more heat than light. Perhaps this sets a precedent for how we might continue the negotiations.

3.18 pm

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I, too, thank the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) for opening the debate. The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) and I may not agree on everything, but he makes a good point about trying to have a thoughtful debate, which is what we are having today. I thank him for his contribution, and I particularly thank Plaid Cymru for giving us the opportunity to discuss this subject.

As a number of Members have argued, the importance of EU nationals to the UK should not and cannot be overestimated in terms of their financial contribution and, more important, how they enrich our society by

being here. I want to live in a society that is made more diverse and enriched by their presence, as is the case in my constituency and others.

Today's debate is particularly helpful because it gives us the opportunity to discuss our own EU citizenship, which we continue to enjoy for the time being. I hope that the Government will give consideration to the idea of associate citizenship suggested by the hon. Member for Arfon, because the benefits of EU membership work both ways—a point that was often lost during the referendum campaign. We look set to lose the huge range of benefits we receive as EU citizens, and nothing the UK Government have said in this debate or others reassures me that they are on top of plugging the gap that will necessarily appear if we are taken out of the European Union.

I have benefited personally from freedom of movement. I was able to work elsewhere in the European Union and receive the benefits of healthcare. I studied there and took part in the Erasmus scheme because of my European citizenship. If I felt ill when I was living in Belgium, I could use the hospitals—there was absolutely no question about or problem with that—and anybody who visited me had exactly the same rights. I feel every inch a European in my identity. I know that identity is not the main driver of this debate, but we should think about it. Even more than that, however, I value my European citizenship.

As I reflect on my own personal experience, one thing that depresses me about where we are going is that by the end of this Parliament, perhaps uniquely, young people will have fewer opportunities and fewer rights than those of us who sit in this Parliament have enjoyed. We should all reflect on that. Regardless of who is in government and which parties make up this place, it should be—indeed, I think it is—the aspiration of all of us that at the end of any Parliament, young people should have more and better opportunities than those who went before them. That should always be our goal, but through the removal of EU citizenship, we will be taking a backward step. Young people will have fewer opportunities. Retaining citizenship would help. I do not think it would plug the gap entirely, but it would help.

The Minister said that she was waiting for the European Union to come up with some ideas about associate EU citizenship, but the European Union did not get us into this mess in the first place; the UK Government did. The fact that, almost two years on, they are still waiting for the EU to come up with solutions tells us a great deal about the state of affairs in the UK Government. It is incumbent on them to look at our problems and meet the challenges. Members are suggesting plenty of ideas—I do not agree with all of them, and neither will everyone else—and the Government should do more than adopt a wait-and-see policy almost two years on from the referendum.

Gently and in a comradely spirit, I urge the Labour party to do the same, especially on issues such as associate membership. I agreed with much of what the shadow spokesperson, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), said, but I encourage him to look a little more deeply into that issue, because we should be addressing it in this Parliament.

There are a lot of gaps to be filled. It strikes me—I have made this point before—that it is not entirely the Government's fault. Vote Leave campaigned on a blank

piece of paper, as has been said a number of times in this Chamber. That is why we still have so many gaps. It is the responsibility of this place to fill some of those gaps, working with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations and local authorities and with other stakeholders. It was an act of gross irresponsibility by Vote Leave not even to bother having a manifesto or a White Paper, which means that we have to fill in the gaps.

In his thoughtful speech, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness referenced the single market. Vote Leave and the leavers should have been very clear that we would be leaving the single market. They were not. It is possible—I direct this as much to those on the Labour Front Bench as to those on the Government Front Bench—to leave the European Union and remain in the single market. That is a fact—end of story. That is something that we can do. It is quite depressing that many of us have to keep on saying that. I cannot believe that we have to use up time in the House of Commons to reiterate that fact.

**Matt Warman:** The hon. Gentleman is factually correct, but the tenor of the campaign that was fought—and I was on the other side of it—was that there would be a clean break with the European Union. In that spirit, does he not think that that means being able to do our own trade deals and leaving the single market?

**Stephen Gethins:** The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn that I disagree with him. No, that is not what it means. He mentions the Government implementing policy in the spirit of how the campaign was conducted, but we have a very different Government with very different policies after the 2017 general election, which was, in the Prime Minister's own words, a Brexit general election.

**Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con):** It is generous of the hon. Gentleman to give way. Is he aware that in the past few hours Donald Tusk has made it absolutely clear that the choice that this Government now face is whether to stay in the single market and customs union or to have a free trade arrangement? Just 52% voted to leave and I can assure Members that nobody who voted leave in my constituency voted for that, especially given the Government's own assessment. This must be the first Government ever in the history of our country to admit that, even if we got what the Prime Minister wants, a free trade agreement will make this country less prosperous. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is the stuff of madness?

**Stephen Gethins:** The right hon. Lady makes an excellent point.

The Scottish Government have published their analysis of what will happen if we leave the single market for a free trade deal, and it is striking that reports show that it would have a devastating impact on our economy. It looks like the same is true of the UK Government's analysis. They must acknowledge that and publish the analysis. At least the Scottish Government have published theirs. If GDP declines, that will be devastating for our public services. I am glad that the Scottish Government have raised taxes very slightly for a minority of the population protect public services, but that is a drop in the ocean compared with what a hit to GDP will mean for our economy, the NHS, education and other public services.

**Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op) rose—**

**Stephen Gethins:** I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Before the hon. Gentleman gives way, I appreciate that he is illustrating his points, but I hope he will soon return to the point of EU citizens, because this motion is fairly narrow. It is important to bear that in mind. He may now give way.

**Stephen Doughty:** I note your comments, Madam Deputy Speaker. Key in the motion is the issue of the single market, and the hon. Gentleman knows that I fully support our remaining in it. He will recall that the Brexit Secretary said that we would get the “exact same benefits”, but that is patently not going to be the case. I totally agree with what the hon. Gentleman was saying, as I too have been to see those Treasury papers, and they are clear that we will be worse off in every scenario. That is not the “same benefits”, be they for citizens, for our businesses or for our country.

**Stephen Gethins:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and it is why today's debate on associate citizenship is so important and why I am so glad it has been brought forward.

I will talk a little about Scotland's own experiences—you will be well aware of this, Madam Deputy Speaker. This idea of European citizenship is not a new concept that arose in the 1970s; it is a historical one. It is said that in 1295 Scots looked at the idea of dual citizenship with the French as part of the auld alliance. If we go down the Corridors through to the House of Lords, we see the English Tudor monarchs on the wall, along with the Scots Tudor monarchs, some of whom were French—the Dauphin of France at that time is up on the wall there. If we look at the rights of Scots traders as citizens in places such as Veere in the Netherlands, we see that a former Member of this House, Winnie Ewing, was the honorary conservator of the privileges of the Scottish staple of Veere back in the day. Going back even further, to the letter of Lubeck, we see that the first thing that William Wallace did after the battle of Stirling bridge and Scottish independence was to get back in touch with our European partners, because this idea of citizenship—this idea of working together and that Scotland is a European nation—does not go back just to the 1970s; it goes back many hundreds of years. I will move on from that point, but I encourage Members to read and listen to the works of my constituent Billy Kay, who has been excellent on the impact of the Scottish diaspora elsewhere in Europe.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker):** The hon. Gentleman is making a fascinating speech, but he is illustrating the point beautifully that our European identities, whether we are English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish, relate to our relations in Europe, not with the European Union.

**Stephen Gethins:** As usual, the Minister leads me nicely on to my next point: this is about more than history and identity. I hope that at some point he will be able to tell us how we will replicate these ideas of

[Stephen Gethins]

citizenship and the benefits we have as citizens—our right to study, to work and to travel, our right to healthcare and our human rights that derive from our European citizenship. One Member made the good point about people who work here being able to work elsewhere at short notice. That goes to the heart of European citizenship, and it is why I am so grateful to the Minister, as usual, for intervening on that point.

The value to our economy of European citizenship is crucial. I think of the academics at the University of St Andrews, who can go to work and collaborate with their partners elsewhere in Europe, but it works in both directions: I think of farmers such as the one next door to me, James Orr, who relies on seasonal workers to pick his broccoli, which must still be picked by hand. The Minister for Immigration talked about certainty. I have heard other Ministers say that EU nationals should now feel a sense of certainty in their citizenship, but my postbag tells a different story, as, I suspect, do the postbags of other Members. That is why I raised the point about military families, but we must also keep in mind other EU nationals, who contribute so much, just as UK citizens in other EU countries do.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a very good speech. I visited one of the largest private sector employers in my constituency on Monday, when I heard about its troubles in accessing labour and the problems that have been exacerbated because of this uncertainty, which has led to many EU nationals who previously worked with it to leave the country.

**Stephen Gethins**: My hon. Friend makes a good point about his constituency experiences, and it has been interesting to hear those from a number of Members.

I noted that Plaid Cymru Members talked about the decline of UKIP. Scotland was always ahead of the game on UKIP, because it never had any success there—I do not believe it ever saved a deposit in a parliamentary election in Scotland. That is why Scotland voted so overwhelmingly to remain part of the EU; it is about our EU citizenship, but it is about so much more than that. I urge the Government to look at these proposals. Interestingly, Greenland, as a part of a European Union member state, left the EU and the other part of the member state remains. I note that when Greenland left, the withdrawal agreement ensured the rights of EU citizens. EU citizenship is built on these links, and it is crucial not only to our economy but to the future of young people. I urge the Government to reconsider, and I thank Plaid Cymru again for bringing this debate to the House.

3.33 pm

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): Being a citizen of the EU brings tangible benefits, and I want to return the debate to focusing a little on the impact of European citizenship on UK citizens. It allows people from the UK to move easily to mainland Europe and between European countries, be it for work, study or pleasure. Furthermore, when we are in Europe it enables us to enjoy a range of rights on healthcare, education, work and social security. Young people I meet feel particularly strongly about this issue. Given the insecurity clouding

the horizons of so many across the UK, it is not surprising that the material freedoms afforded by EU citizenship are held to be so important.

I should mention in passing that it is important to remember that EU citizenship has always been additional to UK citizenship. Never have they been mutually exclusive. For many, EU citizenship and the rights that it entails have become synonymous with opportunity, offering them a chance to broaden their horizons. As has been mentioned, there is no legal reason why a limit must be placed on such opportunity—no reason why UK citizens must be stripped of their rights and freedoms.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): On the topic of reasons, does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the free movement of labour was a key concern of not only those who voted leave but those who voted remain, like me? Does he not believe that, as elected representatives, it is important for us to represent their views?

**Ben Lake**: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, although I fear that perhaps she mistakes the point I was making. Perhaps I was not clear enough: I am discussing the rights of UK citizens and their ability to travel to Europe to work and to live. The issue is not freedom of movement; I am talking about a system that people would be able to opt into, but that they could also opt out of.

It is entirely possible to pursue associate EU citizenship for UK citizens, and there are ample precedents from which such a scheme could draw. The hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) has just mentioned Greenland, and my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) mentioned the experience in Ireland. Perhaps Members would like to look into the interesting situation of the citizens of some of the Crown dependencies in the Channel Islands, where there is a bespoke and unique relationship. I suppose the point I am making is that it is a matter of political will. When it comes to negotiations, there is a way to ensure that benefits are afforded to everybody equally.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a strong case. Currently, young people—indeed, everybody—in the UK can go without a permit to work in 30 other countries: the 27 other EU countries and three of the European economic area countries. After we come out the EU, the number will be zero. A French person of the same age will still be able to go to 29 different countries. What a difference in rights and opportunities that is.

**Ben Lake**: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He makes an important point about unnecessarily limiting the horizons of UK citizens. That is the point I am trying to make, and I wholeheartedly agree with him.

As I mentioned, this is perhaps not a legal issue but more a question of political will. The will of the public—in particular, their support for such a measure—is quite clear. As my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon mentioned in his opening remarks, according to research led by the London School of Economics and Opinion in July 2017, of those Britons asked, six out of 10 wanted to keep their EU citizenship after Brexit, and they particularly wanted to keep the rights to live, work, study and travel within the EU. Support for the retention of those rights

is particularly strong among 18 to 24-year-olds, of whom 85% want to retain their EU citizenship in addition to their British citizenship.

In October 2017, a further report was published by the LSE on youth perspectives and priorities for the Brexit negotiations. Focus groups revealed widespread fear and frustration. Prime among young people's concerns were questions regarding the loss of their EU benefits, including their ability to gain access to educational programmes, opportunities to work and travel in Europe, and rights that they have once they are there.

Ceredigion, the constituency that I have the honour of serving, was one of the handful of Welsh areas that voted to remain. Indeed, prior to the referendum, Ceredigion was widely reported to be one of the most Europhile counties in the whole United Kingdom. To put it bluntly, my constituency did not support leaving the EU and most certainly did not give any Government a mandate to deny its citizens the rights and freedoms that membership of the EU ensures, or, as the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) said, a mandate to limit their horizons and opportunities in comparison with citizens of other European states.

As has been mentioned, the question of the future status of the rights bestowed on UK citizens by EU membership will not disappear; rather, it will grow in both prominence and importance as negotiations progress. A lot has been made of the clarity, or lack thereof, of EU law on the status of the rights of UK citizens after we have left, but I wish to draw attention to international law. European law and its founding treaties may offer a clear interpretation one way, but the reverse is equally clear in international law. If anything, the 1969 Vienna convention on the law of treaties means that it is incumbent on both the UK and the EU to address this matter of future status urgently, for even if article 70(1)(b) of the convention is interpreted in such a way that the withdrawal of a member state from the EU extinguishes the rights of individuals created by the founding treaties, international law would still require that a treaty is agreed on the future status of such rights.

Associate European citizenship is a model that the UK Government could adopt and pursue. As well as affording UK citizens the ability to continue to enjoy the rights and freedoms they currently do, it would safeguard the dormant rights of younger generations, and, perhaps most importantly of all, grant generations yet to be born the same opportunities from which those of us present here today have been able to benefit.

**Stephen Doughty:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making such a passionate and eloquent case, which I wholeheartedly support. Like him, I represent a constituency—Cardiff South and Penarth—in which people voted to remain. Does he share the real horror that I have of speaking to young people? We are still relatively young ourselves, but we had those opportunities to go abroad. I lived in Denmark and Belgium and enjoyed all my opportunities, but we now have to go around our constituencies and tell young people that they will have fewer opportunities, fewer rights and fewer prospects than we did even just a few years ago.

**Ben Lake:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, who has got to the nub of the issue. By not pursuing this option or

addressing the matter more thoroughly, we are at risk of denying our younger generations the opportunities that we were able to enjoy.

**David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ben Lake:** I will give way to the Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee.

**David T. C. Davies:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Is he seriously suggesting that the European Union is likely to ban young people from Britain from travelling in other EU countries? If it was trying to do that, would we not be quite right to walk away from an organisation that was willing to contemplate such an outrageous thing?

**Ben Lake:** I respectfully thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I suggest that what the EU may or may not do is not a matter for this House. I do not think that I have cast any aspersions on what the EU might want to do. What I am saying is that it is in the gift of the Government, and this place, to pursue associate European citizenship to ensure that our young people—in fact not just young people but citizens of the UK old and young—can still enjoy the rights that we currently have.

**David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP):** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. Does he share my concern that a fourth-year student at Lochend High School in Easterhouse should be able to go on to the Erasmus programme in the next year or two, but because of the vague promises that the Prime Minister has made, that opportunity will not be there? It is therefore the UK Government who are taking such opportunities away from the young people in the east of Glasgow.

**Ben Lake:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I agree that the uncertainty is certainly not helpful to anybody. When I speak to a lot of young people, those are precisely the concerns that they raise with me. They do not know what the future holds. At one time, they did know—they were able to plan ahead to do the things that their elder siblings or family members had been able to enjoy. Now they find themselves in the daunting situation of not being able to do so.

My point is that Brexit need not rid UK nationals—young or old—of those rights, and international law is quite clear on that. How UK nationals retain their European citizenship after Brexit is therefore a matter of political will. It is for the Government to propose a model to achieve that, and to negotiate so that it is included in the withdrawal agreement.

Associate citizenship not only presents a possible solution but offers much-needed compromise for an embattled Government and a way to heal the deep divisions that have emerged across the UK. Let me reiterate a point that I made earlier to the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan): this will be a model in which someone could opt in or refuse to opt in—the choice will be theirs. It will be a way to heal divisions. The former Education Secretary, the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening), said that “if Brexit does not work for young people in our country, in the end it will not be sustainable”.—[*Official Report*, 17 January 2018; Vol. 634, c. 918.]

3.44 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Mr Dirprwy Lefarydd. It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) for his introduction to the debate.

I start by stating the obvious. We are not subjects; we are citizens, and as such we are individuals who consent to the rule of Government. The Government rule in accordance with the will of the citizens. We are citizens and we are individuals, and Brexit has consequences for our lives as individuals whether we voted to leave or to remain. I echo exactly what my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion said: surely this debate offers an opportunity to heal divisions within our society and to respect both sides of the referendum vote divide, by respecting individuals and permitting them to choose.

As individuals, we stand to lose our heritage as European citizens—a heritage we might not even have been aware was in our possession, a family treasure forgotten at the back of the display cabinet and about to be discarded in the bitter acrimony of divorce. It is to my surprise that it has taken an Opposition day debate initiated by Plaid Cymru to focus in depth on the wide-reaching implication of the loss we face, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank Professor Volker Roeben and my colleague Jill Evans MEP, who have highlighted both the desirability and the legality of our rights as European citizens, and to thank the thousands who have signed Plaid Cymru's petition in the past two days.

However—this needs to be emphasised, and we need to use the language of Brexit—Brexit must not mean treating individual citizens as vassals, under obligation to our political masters, who might strip us of our citizenship at their whim. It is worth all of us who are speaking in favour of this proposal emphasising that it is clearly permissible in international law. Citizens' rights are not the Government's gift to trade, according to the 1969 Vienna convention on treaties. While an EU member state is democratically free to terminate its EU membership, it cannot extinguish the individual status of citizenship, nor its associated rights, without the consent of the individual.

Is there a precedent for this? We have heard a number of precedents already, and I should like to focus on one. We have lived with it for so long that we possibly do not really appreciate or see its value. Following the creation of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State—now, of course, the Republic of Ireland—politicians debated the implications of how where people lived affected their rights as citizens. Irish citizens who reside in the UK while still remaining Irish citizens enjoy all the benefits of UK citizenship, including the freedom to take up residence and employment in the UK. Irish citizens can play a full part in UK political life, including voting in parliamentary elections and seeking membership of this House. The Republic of Ireland also offers citizenship to all residents of the island of Ireland, and people who are citizens of the UK are entitled to residency in Ireland without any conditions or restrictions. Unlike citizens of other countries, UK citizens are not subject to Ireland's Aliens Act 1935. That means that a UK citizen does not need a visa or any form of residence permit or employment permit in

Ireland. We are entitled to move to Ireland from any country, and we may move to Ireland to work or to retire.

**Joanna Cherry:** Is the hon. Lady, like me, visited in her regular constituency surgeries by many people who are currently British citizens who are lucky enough to have an Irish parent and are looking for an MP's signature on their Irish passport application?

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I am grateful for that intervention, and I wonder whether the way this operates in Ireland might be a model for an opt-in pattern for us to think about if we take this issue through to the next stage of making practical considerations.

Unlike other EU citizens, UK citizens may retire to Ireland without having to establish whether we have sufficient resources or are in possession of health insurance. In fact, if we are visiting Ireland we do not even need a European health insurance card to get healthcare services—only a passport or some form of identification to prove UK citizenship.

Interestingly, that did not happen without parliamentary debate and intervention 96 years ago, much of it initiated, interestingly, by the Conservatives and Unionists of that time. I quote from *Hansard* of 26 June 1922, when Colonel John Gretton—Conservative, Burton—asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies

“whether acceptance of the status of a citizen of the Irish Free State, under... Clause 3 of the suggested Constitution for Southern Ireland,”

would deprive

“the person so accepting of his rights as a British subject in Ireland”.

To which Mr Winston Churchill—for it was he—replied:

“The answer is in the negative.”

Mr Gideon Oliphant-Murray, a Unionist MP from Glasgow, pressed the question:

“Is it not a fact that a citizen of a British Dominion is, ipso facto, a British subject?”

To which Mr Churchill replied:

“So will he be in the Irish Free State.”

Mr Oliphant-Murray:

“That is not the case.”

But Mr Churchill was having nothing of it:

“It is the case.”—[*Official Report*, 26 June 1922; Vol. 155, c. 1663.]

If Winston Churchill felt the need to ensure that individuals should not be stripped of their wished-for citizenship in 1922, surely Conservative Members are honour-bound and loyalty-bound to respect the citizens of 2018 in a similar fashion. All it took was an expression of will on the part of the Conservatives and Unionists of the time and the rights to vote for the Westminster Parliament, as well as the rights of abode and work, were safeguarded. Political will was also brought to bear in relation to Hong Kong, with the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990 and the subsequent 1997 Act, which allowed non-Chinese ethnic minorities to acquire full British citizenship.

I raise these as examples of political need but also flexibility, initiative and a respect for the individual caught up in the crossfire of state game-playing. This is a matter of political will, indicative of what the Government respect—the simplistic legal interpretation of Brexit

zealots, which just so happens to bolster an ideological adherence, or the quiet right of citizens to express their will in accordance with international law. I wonder whether the Government took the opportunity to raise this matter with Guy Verhofstadt when he visited yesterday, and who I note also supports our proposal.

This is not an abstract concept or a nicety of legalese. My daughter Lowri has been able to action her right to live and work in France and Spain without constraint, just as I, somewhat longer ago, was able to action my right to study alongside Irish students in Ireland. I speak for many, many of my constituents when I say that we are proud to exercise our rights as citizens of Wales and citizens of Europe. The state may present its citizens with a referendum and then seek to interpret the frankly uninterpretable result, but it may not strip us of our rights. How our laws are made may change, but that does not give this place the legitimacy to interfere with my children's rights as autonomous individual citizens. What of those young people who were not of an age to vote in 2016? Who are we to say that they may not have the choice that was tacitly agreed in the newly forged relationship with Ireland back in 1922—the choice to opt into a layered citizenship that reflects their individual choice of identity, as Welsh, Scottish, English, and European?

Anyone with a grasp of the history of Wales will know that our country's very name in English deliberately implies two things: first, that we are different—foreign. But the root of the word was used by the Anglo-Saxons not only to imply foreign, but to imply Roman associations. Wales's links with Europe are indivisible from the name imposed on us. Not all of us will recall that we were citizens of Rome 1,600 years ago, but many of us would remain European citizens in the 21st century.

3.53 pm

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): It is a huge pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) on his speech, which opened the debate. He set out the case in his usual forensic style, providing great clarity and detail about what is being proposed. I also thoroughly enjoyed the speeches from the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins), who once again proved why he is one of the superstar performers of this Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), who again showed why he is one of the rising stars of Welsh politics, and my parliamentary leader, my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), who spoke with her usual great authority, concentrating on the example following the independence of Ireland at the beginning of the last century. She gave us a fantastic history lesson in her contribution.

On the morning after the referendum, on 24 June 2016, I had been given the honour of being the guest speaker at the graduation ceremony of the local further education college in my county, Coleg Sir Gâr. The ceremony was held at the fabulous Ffos Las racecourse in Carwe, in my constituency. Somewhat bleary-eyed and shellshocked after watching the referendum results in the early hours of the morning, I vividly remember standing up at the podium and looking out at the hundreds of young graduates and their families before me. I dropped my speaking notes and went completely off script. Instead

of diving into my speech, to talk about how proud they should be of their achievements and how they should look forward to their future, I apologised to those young people.

My apology was based on being part of the political class that had allowed a set of circumstances that would reduce their life chances and opportunities compared with those that had been available to me and the generations before me—primarily the right to travel, live, work, receive healthcare and reside in any other part of the European Union, among other rights. We have had powerful contributions from several Members, and that is the crux of what we are trying to grapple with today.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I apologise to his colleagues that I missed the start of the debate. The reason was that, like the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who spoke a few minutes ago, I am a member of the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union, and some of us had the privilege of meeting a delegation from the Parliament of Slovakia who are in Westminster.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle)**: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he does not have to give a reason for intervening. Don't worry about that; we just want to hear your intervention.

**Peter Grant**: It is highly relevant, Mr Deputy Speaker, because most of the people we met were born in the shadow of the iron curtain. They now have the right to travel all over western Europe and a great deal of central and eastern Europe. Does the hon. Gentleman share my bafflement that while those people are celebrating their fairly recently won right to travel everywhere, we have a Government here that seem determined to take measures that might endanger the right of future generations of UK citizens to travel as freely as our Slovakian friends can travel now?

**Jonathan Edwards**: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. As always, he makes a very valid point. I congratulate him on the excellent work he is doing on the Select Committee. I was privileged to serve on that Committee with him in the last Parliament, and his contributions are always extremely valuable.

Much of the debate following the referendum has surrounded the economic impact of Brexit. There is little doubt in my mind that the best way to protect the Welsh economy is to stay inside the single market and the customs union, and that has been my position from day one. The issue of European Union citizenship rights of UK subjects, however, has not had the level of consideration it deserves.

At this point, I should pay tribute to Jill Evans, the Plaid Cymru MEP representing the whole of Wales who commissioned a report on that issue in the immediate aftermath of the referendum. Her work has gathered considerable support in the European Parliament—including, critically, from Guy Verhofstadt, the lead Brexit negotiator for the European Parliament. Indeed, I understand that the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), has had discussions with Mr Verhofstadt on that issue. I would be grateful to learn from the Minister in his response whether that issue was discussed yesterday with Mr Verhofstadt during

[Jonathan Edwards]

his visit to London. The idea has also gained the support of the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

I sense, perhaps wrongly, that the British Government have an open mind to what we are proposing today. I am being kind, because it has been a very good-natured debate so far. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, in response to the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy)—who I am delighted to see in his place and thank for his contribution, which hit the nail on the head—said:

“The aim of this exercise is to be good for Europe and good for Britain, which means good for the citizens of Europe and Britain. That is what we intend to do.”—[*Official Report*, 2 November 2017; Vol. 630, c. 947.]

In her speech last Friday at Mansion House, the Prime Minister failed to provide any great clarity on some of the main issues that have concerned Members in relation to the British Government's Brexit policy. However, a part of her speech did catch my attention, when she conceded that, despite her hard Brexit policy, she would seek to negotiate UK associate membership status with several EU agencies.

**Anna Soubry:** I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the benefits of our remaining in the single market and the customs union. However, I disagree with him when he says that the Prime Minister's policy is to have a hard Brexit. If one thing absolutely came out of the Mansion House, it was a firm rejection of a hard Brexit. Does he at least agree with me on that?

**Jonathan Edwards:** I am always delighted to hear from the right hon. Lady, with whom I work very closely on these matters. However, I fear that the Prime Minister in her speech managed to continue the strategy of trying to placate both sides of the Conservative party. Ultimately, she is going to have to make a call one way or the other. The fact that the right hon. Lady welcomed the speech and the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) welcomed the speech—

**David T. C. Davies:** And me.

**Jonathan Edwards:** The hon. Gentleman also did so. The fact that they both welcomed the speech leaves me concerned that the Prime Minister is not exactly making a definitive decision on those major issues, on which the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and I actually agree.

As I was saying, the Prime Minister conceded in her speech that she would seek associate membership of several EU agencies. If that is the case, why not apply the same principle to citizenship? Since Plaid Cymru launched our campaign on this issue at the weekend, my Twitter feed has become the location for a lively debate. Indeed, earlier this afternoon I was called a traitor by some people, which indicates the strength of feeling that the debate has generated.

**David T. C. Davies:** I respect the hon. Gentleman, and I totally condemn anyone who has referred to him in that fashion for expressing his views, just as I am sure he would do in relation to those on the other side. We all have a duty here to be courteous in our debate.

**Jonathan Edwards:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. This debate is so serious that it needs to be debated in a very reasonable, calm and rational manner, as we have seen in the House today.

Most people have been extremely supportive of what we are suggesting, but others have seen the campaign as a plot to undermine the referendum result, which could not of course be further from the truth. What we are proposing is that, as part of the negotiations, the British Government make the case that those of us who wish to keep our current rights are able to do so, while those who wish to renounce their rights would also be able to do so if they so wished. If the British Government are serious about healing the wounds of the referendum, I argue that they should pursue such an initiative with vigour, because it could unite everybody in every part of the British state.

The key point is that the rights we currently enjoy under the Maastricht treaty do not in any way challenge or undermine our rights as subjects of the British state. This point was made with vigour by my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion. They are additional rights, and any action by a Government to take away those rights is an extremely serious matter. It is therefore no wonder that this issue is now before the courts in Europe.

As someone who fundamentally believes in Welsh independence, I recognise that, following the political freedom of my country, there will be a requirement to protect the rights currently enjoyed by the people of our respective countries, as was of course the case following Irish independence. I think that answers the point raised by the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton)—he is no longer in his place—in his intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon.

In his article in *The New European* at the weekend, Professor Volker Roeben, who was formerly of the University of Swansea but now works in Dundee in Scotland—I am delighted to see him here—makes the case quite clearly that international and EU law should protect our current EU citizenship from Brexit. I understand that legal opinions differ and I readily admit that I am no legal expert, but he makes a compelling case. I would like to finish my speech by quoting him at some length. He said:

“Of course, a member state is free to terminate its membership for the future, but it cannot extinguish the citizenships that have already been created and the rights that have been exercised—these continue. This status cannot not be taken away neither by the European Union nor by one of its member states.

This is also the impetus of the international law of treaties laid down in the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. This international law will be binding on the EU, the UK and the remaining member states after Brexit. It governs in considerable detail the consequences that the withdrawal of a state from any treaty, including the Founding Treaties, entail.

One consequence is that the treaty ceases to bind, but the other is that the withdrawal must not have retroactive effect on the rights of individuals already created at the time of withdrawal.”

This results in a challenge to the European Commission and, as I readily admit, to the British Government. My understanding is that the European Parliament is far more understanding of the case than the Commission. If this is the case, then MEPs will have an important role in scrutinising the negotiating tactics of Mr Barnier and his team. At the end of the day, as Professor Roeben states, it is a matter of political will. I hope that,

following this debate, Parliament will support the motion and mandate the British Government to negotiate a protection of the rights we all currently enjoy as European citizens.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** I now have to announce the results of today's deferred Divisions. In respect of the question relating to Northern Ireland political parties, the Ayes were 308 and the Noes were 261, so the Ayes have it. In respect of the question relating to passport fees, the Ayes were 317 and the Noes were 258, so the Ayes have it.

*[The Division lists are published at the end of today's debates.]*

**Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op):** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to make a correction to the record. This morning, I referred in a question to the Secretary of State for Scotland during Scotland questions to branch closures by RBS last month. Of the 10 branches given a reprieve last month on the basis that they were the last bank in town, two were not in fact the last branches in town. I suggested that the branch in Melrose, which is not the last bank in town, was in the Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale constituency, which is the constituency of the Secretary of State for Scotland. As a matter of fact, it is in the constituency of Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk. The other branch that is not the last branch in town is located in Kyle, which is in the Ross, Skye and Lochaber constituency, which is the constituency of the leader of the Scottish National party in Westminster. I would like to correct the record to that effect.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** The hon. Gentleman has made that correction.

4.6 pm

**Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP):** May I, too, warmly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) and Plaid Cymru for bringing forward this timely and important debate?

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to declare a non-financial interest. For many years, I have been an honorary consul to Romania for the highlands and islands. I will come back to that later. It seems to me, as we are discussing the rights of European citizenship, that we should all declare our financial interests, as well as many more interests.

The concept of European citizenship was introduced in the 1992 Maastricht treaty, affording rights, freedoms and legal protections to all citizens, as well as giving a legal basis to European identity. Many of those rights are tied up with the four freedoms of the single market, as we heard earlier. European citizens have the right to live, work and study across the EU and associated countries. European citizens are free to trade and transport goods, services and capital through EU borders as in national markets, with no restrictions on capital movements or duty fees. Citizens have the right to vote and run as a candidate in local elections in the country where they live and in European elections, and to participate in the European citizens' initiative. Citizenship of the EU confers the right of consular protection by embassies of other EU member states when a person's country of membership is not represented by an embassy or consulate

in the country in which they require protection. EU citizens have the right to vote for and petition the European Parliament, and the right to address themselves to the European ombudsman and EU agencies directly in their own language if the issues raised are within their competence. Finally, EU citizens enjoy legal protections under EU law, specifically through the charter of fundamental rights of the European Union and through Acts and directives regarding the protection of personal data, the rights of victims of crime, the prevention and combating of trafficking in human beings, equal pay and protection from employment discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, sexual orientation, age and other characteristics. Those are substantial rights for European citizens.

I was privileged to serve as the vice-president of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, a fantastic organisation that brings together local authority areas from across Europe as far apart as Finland and the Azores. We discussed common issues across the European Union in order to get our points made as citizens of the EU about policy. It was a great privilege to do that. I travelled to that group as a European citizen with the rights I have outlined. I was never treated as an outsider or a foreigner, and none of the people I met during that time were ever foreign to me.

As an honorary consul, I have helped Romanian citizens in the highlands and islands, directing them to the support and services they might need. It has never involved my doing anything other than my job of helping people as an MP. It would be the same, and it is the same, for constituents who are Polish, French or German. I am sure we would all do the same. That point of contact has allowed me to build social and economic ties with our Romanian neighbours.

**Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP):** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work to support Romanians and other European citizens in my hometown of Inverness. I welcome the fact that Plaid have brought this debate today, especially as I am a member of Plaid Cymru, as well as a member of the Scottish National party.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Dual citizenship!

**Patrick Grady:** Exactly! In that sense, I am a dual citizen as well. It just shows that we can all get along and perhaps these principles should be extended to everybody.

**Drew Hendry:** Absolutely. On the principle of extending European citizenship, this is deeper than just a set of rights. This is an historic tie, which we should cherish. That identity is very important to Scotland. We have always been a European nation and we continue to be a European nation.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** My hon. Friend is laying out the connections and ties we have been lucky enough to make across Europe. In 2005, I did an internship at the Committee of the Regions not long after the new accession states joined the EU. It was with great joy that I made new friends from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and all the other new countries coming into the EU, who valued that citizenship and the links and ties they could make. Does he share my deep regret that we are no longer going to be a part of that shared project?

**Drew Hendry:** Absolutely, although I would say that the UK Government have it within their gift to ensure, certainly on the issue of European citizenship, that we remain a part of that project.

It is very important to understand the feeling in Scotland, which I know is shared by many people in Wales. I would like to quote from a leader in the *Sunday Herald*, which I think is particularly poignant:

“Scotland has been an outward looking European nation since the late middle ages. From the 16th century, Scots merchants, academics and soldiers spread far and wide in the continent establishing communities in countries like Poland, Sweden and the Low Countries. As a poor nation on Europe’s periphery it was Scotland’s lot to export its people, and the flow continued apace during the British Empire. But intellectual and commercial trade was very much two way. It is no accident that so many European words have entered the Scottish language, such as the Swedish ‘braw’, Dutch ‘kirk’, German ‘ken’, French ‘dour’. Our very language testifies to Scotland’s European connections.”

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I wonder if the hon. Gentleman would care to add to his list: soiree, meaning an evening out; gigot, meaning a leg of lamb; and ashet, on which we cut our lamb and which comes from assiette in French?

**Drew Hendry:** Yes, I would indeed. It is a list to which I could, if I had the time and perhaps the patience of Mr Deputy Speaker, add many more words that highlight that connection. [*Interruption.*] I am being encouraged to go for it, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I will move on.

That is the kind of place Scotland is and the kind of Scotland we want to live in. Our European identity and our shared values with the EU are very much at the heart of that. It is important to reflect that, during the referendum on the EU, 62% voted to remain in the EU and there was a majority to remain in all Scottish local authority areas, yet European Scots face not only the economic and social impacts of Brexit, but losing their European identity. A colleague of mine in the European Parliament, Alyn Smith, said:

“So what does Scotland have right now? Scotland has been an integral part of the EU for almost 50 years, a status that we now face losing. We are represented at every stage of the EU’s activities. The recreation, in 1999, of the Scottish Parliament and the formation of a Scottish Government gave Scotland a far stronger voice within the EU, and has allowed the people of Scotland to find Scottish solutions for Scottish problems and design a society that reflects our needs. This has led to Scotland showing how very European it really is. We stand alongside the rest of Northern Europe by not privatising healthcare, encouraging the development of renewable energy and not charging our citizens for higher education.”

**Jeremy Lefroy:** These rights are held dear not just in Scotland, but throughout the UK. Clause 41 of Magna Carta states:

“All merchants may enter or leave England unharmed and without fear, and may stay or travel within it, by land or water, for purposes of trade, free from all illegal exactions, in accordance with ancient and lawful customs.”

For trade, this goes back not just to the Bill of Rights, but to Magna Carta.

**Drew Hendry:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and for pointing out that the situation looks as though it would have been easier in the time of Magna Carta than it will be if we lose our European citizenship. However, I want to reflect on the highlands and our relationship with European citizenship.

**Anna Soubry:** I suggest that one reason there was such a strong remain vote in Scotland was not just that, as the hon. Gentleman said, people think themselves more European than perhaps British—I do not agree with him about that—but that, as I think we can agree, there is a real understanding of the positive benefits of immigration. When I served on the Scottish Affairs Committee, it was striking that Scotland was crying out for more people to come in and work there. Does he think that the fact that the Scottish people have not been afraid to talk about the positive benefits of immigration may be a large part of the result north of the border?

**Drew Hendry:** The right hon. Lady has stolen my thunder slightly, because the fact that we have received many benefits was exactly where I was going to go next. The very next line of my speech—I am very grateful that she brought this up—is that the long-term issues in the highlands have not been about immigration, but about emigration. That has been a historical problem. Depopulation has been a critical issue in the highlands. Our deepened relationships with the EU have presented an opportunity to welcome EU Scots to our region, a great many of whom have settled in the area.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) highlighted the different attitude to migration, and that really needs to be underpinned by different migration policies and by Scotland being able to decide, as is the case in other countries such as Switzerland, where the 26 cantons can control half the visas. This issue does not have to be centrally controlled in London. In my constituency, I need fishermen to come from Ghana and the Philippines to fish. I cannot get them in, because a person in London often says no. We need a migration Minister with the courage to change that, and I hope we have this time.

**Drew Hendry:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I know that he shares my concerns about the unrealistic, counter-productive, one-size-fits-all net migration target that overlooks the incredible value of migrant people to our isles and the different economic needs of the highlands and islands, and of Scotland as a whole.

Over the next 10 years, 90% of Scotland’s population growth is projected to come from migration. This is especially vital for the highlands. Migration has created cultural and diverse communities that have tied us together, populated by many European Scots, solidifying our European identity. Twenty-one languages are spoken by pupils, for example, at Central Primary School in Inverness, such is the diversity of families settling in the highlands. European citizenship, whether it is our own or that of European citizens who are here, is very important for the economy—tourism accounts for 20% of the economy—as well as many other sectors. I could mention food processing, renewables, life sciences and so on, but I will not pause on those.

**Jamie Stone:** In addition to what the hon. Gentleman says about migration to our country, Scotland, the historical emigration of Scots was a curse on the highlands for many years, but European investment in infrastructure, via schemes such as objective 1, helped halt—and indeed reverse—that, meaning that classmates of mine and

younger generations stayed in the highlands, rather than seeking their fortunes outwith the beloved land they came from.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Drew Hendry:** Absolutely—hear, hear! The point about young people staying in the highlands is critical, but, conversely, their ability to move freely throughout Europe, gain skills and come back is also very important. I have personal experience of this. My two boys went off to work in Europe, gain skills and broaden their horizons. One has already come back to Scotland to add to our economy the skills he gained in Europe. As my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) mentioned, the ability of young people to travel through and study and work in Europe and to live as European citizens has been transformational, not just for them but for our economy—locally, in the highlands, across Scotland and, I contend, across the whole of the UK. We should cherish that. It should not be under threat.

**Peter Grant:** As a student, I not only benefited from the ability to travel in France and elsewhere but spent a month just outside my hon. Friend's constituency working on a fruit farm in Beauvy—which, of course, is French for "beautiful place". Does he agree that, as well as people from the UK losing out if they cannot travel freely across Europe, if European citizens are restricted in their ability to come here, young people here will lose out on the benefits of mixing with people from a wide range of backgrounds, and as well as the free movement of people, the free movement of ideas and beliefs is vital and should be retained?

**Drew Hendry:** My hon. Friend makes a terrific point that we should pause to reflect on during this discussion, and it is not just about the ability of young people to interact in that way. I have often said that I aspire to be an older person and that I am making good progress—I have used that line before and will do so again. It is not just about young people; European citizenship is key to everyone's ability to broaden their horizons.

Just today—ironically—there was an announcement about the introduction of free inter-rail travel across Europe. Young people face losing out on that; they face losing out on the end to roaming charges and consequently a loss of connectivity; and, as mentioned earlier, they face losing the European health protection that has enabled them to reduce the cost of living and studying.

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** The hon. Gentleman is describing very eloquently the opportunities that his sons have had travelling through the EU. Is this not precisely a question of education and the opportunities our young people have to travel, and was not the Brexit vote particularly strong where educational opportunities were not very high? Rather than leaving the EU and restricting young people's ability to go to the EU, is it not important that we extend educational opportunities to all young people in this country?

**Drew Hendry:** On the life chances that young people will have as they grow into adults and move through their careers, it is critical that every opportunity they get to broaden their horizons be embraced, and we should do everything possible to avoid anything that removes their ability to broaden their horizons, such as losing their EU citizenship.

I want to quote a couple of paragraphs from Jolyon Maugham QC:

"The idea of European citizenship has its roots in the aftermath of the second world war, when Winston Churchill"—

my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) quoted him earlier—

"spoke of a 'common citizenship' that would unite Europe together 'in the sharing of its common inheritance'".

He went on to say:

"European citizenship confers a number of privileges: the right to live in and move freely between member states",

and all the other things that I mentioned earlier.

"The shared assumption of the European Union and the UK government is that Brexit will mean British citizens will automatically forfeit these rights. But this is being tested in a case brought by a group of UK nationals living in Amsterdam, which I funded with the help of Dutch law firm Bureau Brandeis, which agreed to act for a modest fee."

He ended by saying, as one who was born in London,

"I am a Londoner, I am British, and I am European. They're not mutually exclusive".

The same applies to Scotland. Citizenship of Europe is very important to us. Scotland is not foreign to Europe, and Europe is not foreign to Scotland. We are Europeans.

I am grateful to the Merriam-Webster thesaurus for its definition of "foreigner" as

"a person who is not native to or known to a community."

EU citizenship has made that an antonym. Those people are our buddies, our chums, our comrades, our confidants, our cronies, our friends, our pals, our mates, our partners and our peers. We are European. We should retain the rights and benefits of European citizenship, and I hope that the Government will ensure that that happens.

4.26 pm

**Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab):** I thank my colleagues in Plaid Cymru for initiating this welcome debate.

European citizenship confers numerous privileges: the right to live in and move freely between member states, the right to diplomatic and consular assistance from other member states, and the right to participate in elections to the European Parliament. It is a principle of UK citizenship law that individuals cannot be stripped of their citizenship because of territorial changes. The UK Government must clarify whether that principle should apply to the protection of European citizenship.

It is shameful that, although the Tory manifesto on which the previous UK Government were elected promised to—at last—allow British citizens who had lived abroad for more than 15 years to vote, those people were then denied a chance to vote in the referendum. The voices of about 1 million people went unheard. It is also shameful that the UK Government have not yet delivered on the promise that the EU's freedom of movement rights will be honoured for all citizens who reside in other nations in the European economic area. For many UK citizens who did not have the chance to vote in the referendum, and for many who voted to remain because they did not wish their European citizenship rights to be taken away from them, this Brexit—whatever it is—is nothing like the epitome of democracy that some hard Tory Brexiters would have us think.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Is this not the greatest tragedy of the way in which the Brexit negotiations are unfolding? The people who voted leave were not being given the Brexit for which they voted on the timescale for which they voted, but the biggest losers will be the people throughout the country—especially the young—whose opportunities will become far more limited because of the type of Brexit that is being pursued. Furthermore, every parent and grandparent in the country should reflect on the damage that is being done to the prospects of their children and grandchildren.

**Anna McMorrin:** That is an excellent point with which I completely agree. Indeed, I am about to speak about just that issue.

Brexit is an injustice that will take away rights without giving people the option to secure those rights in the long term for themselves and their children. The idea of European citizenship is cherished by those who are old enough to remember a time when Europe was going through a healing process. We seem to have forgotten that it was not always the peaceful, prosperous place that it is today: a union of people, not merely nations. It is a pity that there are elected politicians in this House who are unwilling to understand the strong feelings of many British people about their European identity.

**Stephen Doughty:** My hon. Friend and constituency neighbour is making a strong speech. Does she agree that many people, particularly in places like Cardiff where we have a strong and thriving university sector, see themselves much more as part of pan-European collaboration in science and driving forward progress in discovery, and key to that is their European Union citizenship? By taking that away we potentially do great damage to those relationships on a European level that are taking forward all sorts of exciting scientific discoveries.

**Anna McMorrin:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am proud to represent Cardiff North, and the whole of Cardiff is a diverse community. We have plenty of students from across the European nations, and we want to retain that feeling of European identity and citizenship.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making very important points. She mentioned the politics of this, and it used to be the case that the Conservatives supported the single market and these issues. I feel very strongly that Labour should fly the flag for citizens' rights within the context of the single market. That is an incredibly important thing, and I hope that eventually my Front-Bench team will also recognise that the single market is the best way to offer these protections.

**Anna McMorrin:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He knows my personal feeling, representing Cardiff North, which is a strong remain constituency: most of my constituents would love us to remain in the single market.

**Emma Little Pengelly** (Belfast South) (DUP): I too represent a university constituency, and I recognise the concerns raised by our young people who want to access the opportunities the EU gives them. We need to

fight to ensure that opportunities continue after Brexit, but does the hon. Lady also recognise that this is very much a game of two halves: although many young people, particularly university students, could take up those opportunities, which are very welcome, many other young people from disadvantaged backgrounds would never have the money to be able to travel to Europe and could never take up those options, and their employment prospects were deeply damaged by their being undercut by the free movement of people across the EU?

**Anna McMorrin:** I beg to disagree with the hon. Lady. The best way to retain those opportunities for young people from all types of background—disadvantaged and not—is to keep those opportunities open and to work to be a citizen of the EU, and for the UK Government not to take us on the damaging Brexit course they are currently taking us on.

**Stephen Gethins:** I thank the hon. Lady for making a very important point. Does she agree that tens of thousands of young people from all parts of the UK and from all backgrounds have benefited, because the EU has allowed those from more disadvantaged backgrounds to get educational opportunities they would never otherwise have had?

**Anna McMorrin:** I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I worked in Brussels for a time, as well as in other EU countries, and I can see the benefits for young people from all backgrounds.

This is about identity. It is about what we call ourselves in terms of our identity and citizenship. I call myself Welsh and European, and I will continue to do so in equal measure even after Brexit.

I urge the Government to look at the practical benefits of European citizenship, and to support demands to allow British people to continue to benefit from it. As I said, I lived, studied and worked in France, Spain and Belgium when I was younger. It is a shame to think that my two daughters will not be able to have those same experiences and opportunities because the UK Government did not think EU citizenship was worth fighting for. Brexit will do nothing more than isolate us as a nation and cut off those benefits and opportunities for our younger people.

To be Welsh and European is to be open and inclusive. The Welsh writer Gwyn Thomas expressed that beautifully when he said that south Wales society is “the most marvellously interpenetrating thing” where

“everyone was sensitive and thin skinned to the problems of others”.

He described it as a

“warm soup of comradeship, love, singing, understanding”.

That is how we should consider citizenship of the whole European Union, and I urge this Government to have the courage to safeguard our citizenship as we exit the EU.

4.35 pm

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What a pleasure it is to follow such a fantastic speech from the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin). I begin by commending and thanking our colleagues in Plaid Cymru for securing this debate. I believe that this is the

first time in history that Plaid Cymru has had its own Opposition day debate, and I hope that we will have more of them.

Most people who have taken part in this debate have declared an interest. I look up at the annunciator and see my German surname, and I am incredibly proud to be someone of German descent in this House. I am also incredibly proud to represent Scotland, where 62% of the population voted to remain in the European Union. All 32 local authority areas voted to remain, and my constituency voted remain. However, we see ourselves looking over the cliff-edge of a hard Brexit to which we have been driven by the Back Benchers of the Conservative party, and it is something that Scotland did not vote for.

The points made during the debate, particularly by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), about the impact on young people really amplify the disaster that Brexit will be. I have questioned the Prime Minister about the Erasmus scheme, and she can give us certain guarantees about the next year or two. However, the reality is that a young person studying at Lochend Community High School in Easterhouse, a deprived area in my constituency, currently has the opportunity to travel and see other parts of Europe through Erasmus. That directly answers the point made by the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) about young people from deprived backgrounds.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** Just to build on that, my point was that, yes, it is fantastic that young people have such opportunities, and we have tried to encourage take-up in Northern Ireland, but I speak to many young people from deprived communities who have said, “We apply for job after job across the European Union.” There are record levels of NEETs—young people not in employment, education or training—and to understand what motivates people we must understand that those opportunities do not apply to everybody. We need to recognise that that was part of the challenges of the single market and free movement of people and part of why people were opposed to it.

**David Linden:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention. I have been campaigning on apprenticeships during my time in the House, and, as a former modern apprentice, I am glad that we are taking part in National Apprenticeship Week. However, the reality is that this Government have a poor record when it comes to paying young people. Young people are not included in the national living wage, and an apprentice can still, under the law, be paid as little as £3.50 an hour. I am absolutely in favour of ensuring that young people are paid appropriately, but that is not necessarily something for the European Union. I think responsibility for that lies at the door of the UK Government, who have a pretty woeful record on employment rights and pay for young people.

The hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) talked about the importance of staying in the single market and the customs unions—I stress that I mean “the” customs union. I hope that his particular wing of the Labour party grows stronger and can convince his Front-Bench team of the importance of remaining in the single market and the customs union, because failure to do so will result in the sacrifice of 80,000 jobs in Scotland. I represent a constituency with fragile employment

prospects. Unemployment in my constituency is double the UK average, which is one reason I am particularly furious that UK Government have just closed two of the three jobcentres in my constituency. Only last week, I was dealing with two companies that have announced the closure of stores in my constituency because they are going into administration. One reason for that were the fluctuations in the pound due to the uncertainty caused by Brexit. We need to be absolutely clear about the need to protect jobs. I agree with the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) about the importance of a jobs-first Brexit, but the only way to achieve that is by ensuring that we stay in the single market and the customs union, so I very much hope that the hon. Member for Nottingham East manages to convince his Front-Bench colleagues.

**Mr Leslie:** That is good timing by the hon. Gentleman, because this afternoon the European Commission published its draft negotiation for the future relationship. One of the final paragraphs states that the European Union will be prepared to reconsider the idea of an FTA settlement if circumstances change and the situation evolves. The EU is saying that if the Government drop their ridiculous, self-imposed red lines on the customs union and the single market, it will allow us to have those benefits. I think that is the route we need to pursue.

**David Linden:** Absolutely. Unsurprisingly, I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Prime Minister conceded yesterday that roaming charges will come back. The Government are spending all this time talking about taking back control, but they will not be taking back control of my phone bill the next time I go to Europe, because it is going to go through the roof.

These things were all put on the side of a bus, which brings me to my next point. When I went with my wife and son to the polling station to vote in the EU referendum, there was nothing on my ballot paper about leaving the single market and the customs union. Conservative Members spend a huge amount of time telling us that people knew what they were voting for. If that is the case, people thought they were voting for £350 million extra a week for the national health service, and we do not see much evidence of that happening.

My final point—I say this as someone who respects the will of Parliament—relates to the absence of certain Members who spend a huge amount of time talking about parliamentary sovereignty. I suspect that, once again, an Opposition day motion will pass. There is much in this motion that is absolutely commendable and I would be more than happy to support it in a Division. My challenge to hon. Members, particularly those with a Brexit background who claim that we are taking back control and empowering this place, and who say, “We must respect what the House of Commons says,” is to acknowledge that, when this motion passes, it is incumbent on the Government to support it and implement it. I very much hope that the Government will adhere to it and that they will not ignore Parliament. If they are serious about taking back control, that starts with listening to this House of Commons.

4.42 pm

**Hywel Williams:** Right hon. and hon. Members will forgive me if my comments are fairly brief, given my current condition. I am pleased to say that this has been

[Hywel Williams]

a high-quality debate, in contrast to the debate out in the country. We have heard positive contributions from about a dozen hon. Members. Perhaps that has something to do with the absence of the usual suspects, particularly on the Conservative Benches, who continually repeat the same tired arguments, to very little positive effect. I am gratified by the emphasis that so many hon. Members have put on the rights of young people, thus looking to the future, not to the past.

It is a somewhat novel idea for this place to talk about the continuation of European Union citizenship after we leave. It is not surprising, therefore, that Members have been tempted to wander away to questions about the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and to the Brexit question in general. I do not think that that has impeded or hampered the debate; it has been a suitable counterpoint.

In her initial response, the Minister for Immigration made her central point that when we leave the European Union, EU citizenship will lapse, but Opposition Members have clearly made the counter-argument that international law suggests the very opposite. I will take the opportunity yet again to draw attention to the report “The Feasibility of Associate EU Citizenship for UK Citizens Post-Brexit”, which argues the case clearly, based on the Vienna convention, specifically article 71(b).

I am glad that this has turned out to be a positive if shortish debate, and I look forward to hearing a positive response from the Government.

4.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker):** I congratulate Plaid Cymru on its first Opposition day debate, the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) on tabling the motion and the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) on opening the debate with his usual eloquence, passion and power. I congratulate everyone who has contributed to a genuinely considered discussion on maintaining European Union citizenship for British nationals.

It is entirely proper that we debate issues relating to the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union, and the rights that we hold today as European citizens are an important aspect of that. I have heard many arguments from across the Chamber today as to why we should seek to secure some form of continuation of EU citizenship for British nationals after we withdraw from the European Union. I welcome the varied contributions made to this important debate, including the report by Jill Evans MEP and Swansea University, to which several colleagues referred.

I have listened closely to the arguments that the rights and protections held by individuals with EU citizenship are, in some cases, integral to their identity. We had a fascinating discussion about identity, and my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) spoke well about some of the complexities of that and how his constituency has been shaped by Europe in a different way from some others. I should say that the Prime Minister has made it clear, and I reiterate, that we are leaving the European Union; we are not leaving Europe. On this question of identity, at the end of this process we will still all be citizens of a European state.

**Stephen Gethins:** The motion says:

“That this House supports the maintenance of European Union citizenship rights”.

Will the Minister confirm that if the motion is approved by the House, that will be part of his negotiating strategy?

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting suggestion. I said that we listened carefully to the debate, and of course we always listen carefully to decisions of this House. In response to the calls from my colleagues in this House and the other place, and from Members of the European Parliament, to argue for the continuation of EU citizenship for UK nationals, let me say that, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration confirmed earlier, we will always be very happy to listen to any proposals on our exit from the European Union. However, as EU treaty provisions state that only citizens of EU member states are able to hold EU citizenship, when the UK ceases to be a member of the European Union, UK nationals will no longer hold EU citizenship, unless of course they hold dual nationality from another EU member state. It is important that we respect the EU’s legal order, and of course our own, when EU treaties and EU law no longer apply to the UK.

I wish to take this opportunity to respond on the doctrine of acquired rights, which I know the House of Lords EU Committee looked into, expressing some concern about the validity of acquired rights in this context. Article 70 of the Vienna convention was mentioned by a number of colleagues, including the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake). To be clear, article 70 is a “default” rule, which does not apply where the parties to a treaty agree arrangements relating to a particular party’s withdrawal. The UK and the EU will agree these arrangements under the article 50 process, to be defined in the withdrawal agreement. The argument on acquired rights under article 70 does not, therefore, apply in the context of these negotiations.

**Hywel Williams:** Can the Minister confirm that it is a matter of political will whether we retain those citizens’ rights?

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. Of course it is a question of political decisions on both sides and respect for one another’s legal orders. The prospect of maintaining EU citizenship for UK nationals is not something that has been suggested to us to date in the negotiations, either by the European Commission or by any individual member state. Throughout the negotiations we have, however, put citizens at the heart of our approach.

**Wera Hobhouse:** Does the Minister not agree that the Prime Minister is proposing, in many ways, that we are going to see very new shores—for example, with the border without a border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland? If we are really looking for new opportunities, this would be exactly such an opportunity, where we are doing something that has not been done before.

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Lady makes an interesting point. Of course, in our joint report we made specific commitments on the Irish border that we absolutely stand by.

It has been the Government's policy from the very beginning to provide certainty and stability for UK citizens who have made their lives in the EU and for EU citizens here in the UK. As the Prime Minister set out at Mansion House last week, EU citizens are an integral part of the economic, cultural and social fabric of our country, which is why we made it a priority to secure in the first phase of the negotiations a fair deal on citizens' rights that will allow for UK and EU citizens to continue their lives broadly as they do now.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration detailed earlier in the debate—

**Liz Saville Roberts** *rose*—

**Mr Walker:** I will give way to the hon. Lady after I have made this point, if I may.

The comprehensive agreement that we secured in December grants citizens certainty about a wide range of rights, including residents' healthcare, which was highlighted by the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins), as well as pensions and other benefits. That means that UK nationals who are living in the EU at the point of exit will continue to benefit from rights that stem from their EU citizenship today. After our exit, those rights will be provided for by the withdrawal agreement, which will enshrine them and take the status of international law, having direct effect in EU member states. They will also be written into UK law by Parliament, through the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I hope the Minister will forgive me for taking him back to a point he made earlier, but if the proposal for the citizens of Northern Ireland is suitable for them, why is it not suitable for the citizens of Wales, Scotland and England?

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Lady raises a good point. She touched on some of the history in her speech and I was very interested in her historical references. There are long-standing commitments that the UK has made to the citizens of all of Ireland, and we built on those in the Belfast Good Friday agreement. I shall return to them towards the end of my speech. We have to recognise that those provisions were brought about by unique circumstances that date back long before our membership of the EU.

The Government have shown that we have listened to calls to provide certainty to EU citizens in the UK, by ensuring that citizens will be able to rely directly on the rights enshrined in the withdrawal agreement through the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, which will be introduced to Parliament after the withdrawal agreement has been finalised. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration mentioned, we have listened to feedback from communities throughout the UK on the process of acquiring settled status. We have been clear that the new application scheme will be digital, streamlined and user-friendly. We are consulting regularly with EU citizens' user groups and employers as we design the system.

On the point made by the hon. Member for North East Fife, we will make sure that those who undertake overseas postings, including military service in our armed forces, will not be disadvantaged.

**Stephen Doughty:** I hope I can tempt the Minister back to the rights that UK citizens currently have as EU citizens. He said a few moments ago that it had not been suggested in the negotiations, but Guy Verhofstadt has been clear that he believes that UK citizens would be able to retain their EU citizenship rights on an individual basis. What does the Minister have to say about that clear proposal?

**Mr Walker:** As the hon. Member for Arfon mentioned earlier, I have personally discussed this issue with Guy Verhofstadt. I put it to him that we are negotiating with the Commission, so he needs to make that point to the Commission. If he wishes that to be part of the negotiations, it needs to be discussed in that context. After his meeting in Downing Street this week, Guy Verhofstadt said:

"I think it is possible in the coming days and coming weeks we make progress on this"

issue for citizens

"and we can conclude on this...It should be fine that the citizens rights' chapter is done, it is finished, it is concluded and everybody knows UK nationals and EU citizens know what their status is in the future."

I welcome that statement.

Some colleagues have referred to rights that are not covered by the agreement we have reached so far—for example, the right of onward movement for UK nationals. The EU's approach so far has been to say that it is not an issue that can be resolved in this phase of the negotiations, but we have had meetings on the topic with Members of the European Parliament, and I know that they are as keen as we are to secure that right. It is not something on which we have in any way given up.

Other colleagues, including the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, referred to the right to stand and vote in local and national elections. I stress that we wanted that right to continue—we would have liked it to be part of the citizens' rights agreement—but the European Commission again ruled that it was outside the scope of the first stage of the negotiations. We have made a commitment to protect that right for EU citizens currently in the UK, and we want that to be reciprocated. A number of member states already have provisions allowing nationals of a third country to vote in local elections, and we will continue to explore that with other member states bilaterally.

The hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) mentioned plans to legislate to enable UK citizens living overseas for more than 15 years to retain their right to vote. I am sure that, like me, she welcomed the Government's support for legislation of this nature just the Friday before last.

As the House will be aware, we are seeking to agree an implementation period of about two years beyond the date of our exit. The purpose of such a period is to give people, businesses and public services in the UK and across the EU the time they need to put in place new arrangements that will be required to adjust to our future partnership. I want to be clear that, during this implementation period, we intend that people will be able to come to the UK to live, study and work, as they do now. We are discussing the precise terms of the implementation period with the EU and we aim to reach agreement by the March European Council.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): My hon. Friend is clearly articulating what the aims and the goals of the Government are. A minute ago, he mentioned reciprocation. Is it not the case that that is at the core of all this? We are asking not for special rights for EU citizens, or indeed for UK citizens, but for a fair and reasonable exit process from the EU that retains reciprocal rights.

**Mr Walker:** My hon. Friend and neighbour is absolutely right. We want reciprocal rights and reciprocal respect for one another's political and legal systems.

We recognise that, in the future, as the hon. Member for Arfon noted, UK citizens will still want to work and study in EU countries, just as EU citizens will want to do here, helping to shape and drive growth, innovation and enterprise. None the less, the people of the United Kingdom did choose to leave the EU, and, as he pointed out, Wales voted by a majority to leave. As a result of that decision, the EU treaties will no longer apply to the United Kingdom and the Government have been clear that freedom of movement will come to an end.

I listened with interest to the part of today's debate that dealt with suggestions for our continued membership of the single market. We accept that there is a balance of rights and responsibilities in the treaties and that, in choosing to leave the EU, we will put those rights in a new and different balance. We understand and respect the indivisible nature of the four freedoms, which is why leaving the EU and ending free movement and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice does mean leaving the single market.

The Government propose a unique and ambitious partnership, which will be based on our rules and regulations being the same from the start and on maintaining our commitment to free trade and high standards, while allowing us to both make changes when we want to in a stable and orderly way, as my hon. Friend just said, with respect for one another's systems. The exact shape of this future relationship has yet to be negotiated, but as the Prime Minister noted last week, we recognise the need to maintain the social, economic and cultural links between our people and ensure that businesses can attract and employ the people they need. That is why we are taking an evidence-based approach to our future immigration policy—something that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) managed to both call for and rail against at the same time. We commissioned an independent advisory body, the MAC, to gather evidence on patterns of EU migration and its role in the wider economy. That will include consideration of the impacts on the different parts of the UK, within the context of designing a UK-wide immigration system.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** Just to clarify, my point was about the Government's inaction on bringing forward legislation.

**Mr Walker:** If the hon. Gentleman wants to take an evidence-based approach, he has to make sure that his legislation is based on that evidence and the studies that are being conducted. He also suggested that the CBI had been critical of the Government. In fact, the CBI

welcomed our recent announcement on citizens' rights during the implementation period. Its director general said that this is

“a big step in the right direction”,  
and that:

“This announcement will remove significant short-term uncertainty for family, businesses and wider communities.”

We have also listened carefully to the evidence.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** *rose*—

**Mr Walker:** I do want to move on, because I realise that I am taking a bit of time, but I will give way one last time to the hon. Gentleman.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way once again, but the quote from the CBI was about the inaction on the Immigration Bill, when the CBI declared itself to be hugely frustrated.

**Mr Walker:** The CBI is a key consultee of the MAC process; I am sure that it wants to play a full part in the process and to make sure that the legislation, when it comes forward, is based on the evidence.

Talking of listening to the evidence, I listened carefully to hon. Members in this debate when they talked about young people's opportunities to study and to travel, and about the benefits of working together on issues such as science and research. We set out in our “Collaboration on science and innovation: a future partnership paper” a strong ambition to continue to co-operate and collaborate with EU member states, and indeed the many third-country members of its framework programmes, in that area. The Prime Minister spoke in Florence about maintaining the educational, cultural and scientific links between us and fellow members.

**David Linden:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way; he is being most generous. May I press him on the point that I raised with the Prime Minister? At the time that a second-year student now at Lochend Community High School in my constituency leaves school and goes to university, will they still be able to take part in Erasmus?

**Mr Walker:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, the current Erasmus programme is covered by the current multi-annual financial framework of the European Union, which ends in 2020. We need to look at what future frameworks would look like and how negotiations would approach the issue in future, but we have already set out a very positive UK position. We look forward to engaging with the EU on many issues, as part of the discussions of our future partnership.

In the debate, there was some discussion of the powers of devolved Administrations to act on citizens' rights. I should make it clear that we are committed to securing a deal that works for the entire United Kingdom—for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and all parts of England. We expect the outcome of leaving the European Union to be a significant increase in the decision-making power of each devolved Administration. I look forward to discussing that further when I attend the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) tomorrow. The deal secured in December is, of course, without prejudice to the common travel area between the UK and Ireland and

the rights of British and Irish citizens in each other's countries. We stand by our commitments in the Belfast agreement, one of which is that the people of Northern Ireland have the right to choose to be British, Irish or both. Maintaining those rights means that the people of Northern Ireland will not be required to assert and choose a specific identity in order to access public services and other entitlements. Their rights to work, study and access social security and public services will be preserved on a reciprocal basis.

I am grateful for the time and contribution of all Members to this important debate. I have listened carefully to the points that have been raised across the House. Whilst associate citizenship is not within the current scope of negotiations, I reiterate that I will always be happy to listen to proposals from colleagues or our European counterparts on how we can best safeguard the rights of UK nationals.

I want to be clear that at every step of these negotiations, we will work to secure the best possible deal for all UK nationals, including those currently living in the EU and those who wish to travel to the EU in future. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has repeatedly made clear, although we are leaving the European Union, we are not leaving Europe. I remind colleagues that the concept of EU citizenship only appeared in the Maastricht treaty of 1993. We were citizens of Europe long before Maastricht, and while we may now be leaving the political structures of the European Union and its treaties, we will not be any less European as a result.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House supports the maintenance of European Union citizenship rights for Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish and English citizens, notes that the range of rights and protections afforded to individuals as European Union citizens are integral to a person's European identity; further notes that many of those rights are closely linked to the UK's membership of the Single Market; and calls on the UK Government to ensure that the UK's

membership of the Single Market and UK citizens' right to European Union citizenship are retained in the event that the UK leaves the EU.

**David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. At Prime Minister's questions today, the Leader of the Opposition stated that British armed forces were directing the attacks in Yemen. I checked with No. 10 Downing Street and that is completely incorrect. British armed forces personnel are not involved in any way at all with what is going on in Yemen or Saudi Arabia. We are about to discuss our armed forces, and I feel that comments like that could actually be putting our armed forces at risk. I wondered whether you had had any indication that the Leader of the Opposition is going to come to the House to apologise and put the record straight.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** First of all, it is not a matter for the Chair, as you well know. You have put it on the record, but it is certainly not for the Chair to intervene, either on behalf of the Opposition or the Prime Minister.

**Hywel Williams:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will be very glad to be able to tell our European friends that this House now supports the idea of maintaining European Union citizenship rights. This follows the motion passed by the Brussels Parliament in March 2017, which also supported the idea of continuing associate EU citizenship for British nationals post Brexit. I seek your confirmation that as this motion has now passed, the Government must respond with a statement in this place on this matter within the next 12 weeks.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Obviously it is not a matter for the Chair. It is a matter for the Government to respond. The vote has been taken. The House has shown its view, but it is for the Government to respond accordingly.

## Armed Forces Covenant: Northern Ireland

5.4 pm

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the valuable contribution made by men and women from Northern Ireland to our armed forces, including some of the best recruited Reserve Units in the UK and reaffirms its commitment to ensure that the Armed Forces Covenant is fully implemented in Northern Ireland.

I am delighted to move the motion in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Democratic Unionist party. As a party, we are proud of the contribution made by the men and women from Northern Ireland who have served the United Kingdom in many theatres of conflict across the globe and, indeed, especially in Northern Ireland itself. We salute their sacrifice, but also the sacrifice of all members of our armed forces, who courageously serve this country in many ways and in many parts of the world.

It is estimated that some 300,000 military personnel were deployed in Northern Ireland in the course of Operation Banner, which was the longest-running military operation in the history of the British Army. A significant proportion of the veterans who served in Operation Banner currently reside in Northern Ireland. That includes between 56,000 and 60,000 who served with the Ulster Defence Regiment or the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service battalions, as well as many other units with which Ulster men and women served in the course of Operation Banner.

The Ulster University is currently conducting a study to identify the number of veterans resident in Northern Ireland and requiring welfare support. The initial reports published by the research team at the university make interesting reading, and I commend them to Ministers and the team at the Ministry of Defence. The reports and the research undertaken by the Ulster University provide an interesting insight into the needs of veterans in Northern Ireland and seek to quantify the extent of that need.

In addition to Operation Banner, we have an increasing proportion of armed forces personnel from Northern Ireland who have been deployed on operations in other parts of the world, including Iraq and Afghanistan, and other places such as Mali, Sierra Leone and so on. They include many members of our reserve units in Northern Ireland. I note that the Minister responsible for reserves, the right hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), is in his place. I pay tribute to our reserve forces in Northern Ireland. We have some of the best-recruited reserve units in the United Kingdom, such as the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment, which is headquartered at Thiepval barracks in my constituency in Lisburn. It is one of the best-recruited infantry reserve units in the United Kingdom. We have HMS Hibernia, following a proud tradition of Ulster men and women who have served with the Royal Navy, which is also based at Thiepval barracks in my constituency, and 502 Ulster Squadron of the Royal Air Force, located at Aldergrove, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Paul Girvan). We will soon be joining them in celebrating the centenary of the formation of the Royal Air Force.

We commend the men and women who have given up valuable time to serve in our reserve units and those who leave their families to go and serve with the regular armed forces, in many parts of the world.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): Does the right hon. Gentleman share the painful disappointment that I feel that there are so few Members on the Government and Opposition Benches this afternoon for this important debate, bearing in mind the enormous sacrifice made by so many members of the British Army, particularly those in the UDR, who were often part-time farmers who gave their lives and paid the ultimate sacrifice during the troubles in Northern Ireland? I personally have to say how disappointed I am that there is not a better turnout for today's debate.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** I thank the hon. Lady for that comment. It is my experience in this House—this is my 21st year as a Member of Parliament—that, across the House of Commons, I find nothing but respect for our armed forces, especially those who have served in Northern Ireland. When I have attended events here in Parliament where we have remembered that sacrifice, I have always been struck by the depth of the gratitude felt by right hon. and hon. Members for that service, notwithstanding the disappointment that the hon. Lady feels at the attendance today, although that is not untypical for debates here of any kind. I do not honestly believe that it reflects any disrespect on the part of this House for the men and women who serve and have served in our armed forces.

A recent report published by the World Health Organisation on post-traumatic stress disorder found that Northern Ireland has a higher incidence of PTSD and trauma-related illnesses than other conflict-related countries in the world. That includes places such as Lebanon and Israel. Remarkably, the study found that nearly 40% of people in Northern Ireland had been involved in some kind of conflict-related traumatic incident. The survey estimated that violence had been a distinct cause of mental health problems for about 18,000 people in Northern Ireland.

Against that backdrop, the health and social care system in Northern Ireland has sought to provide support and treatment service to people with mental health problems, and especially ones linked to trauma, but I have to say that it is struggling to cope with the pressures. As Ministers will know, it is often the case for service personnel that PTSD does not really make an impact for several years or more after the original incident. We are therefore seeing a pattern in Northern Ireland now of those who served in our armed forces developing mental health problems in later life, as well as physical injury-related medical problems, and that is putting real pressure on local health services. We feel that that needs to be more closely addressed.

Of course, that is not unique to the armed forces—the civilian population in Northern Ireland suffered dreadfully, and there is ample evidence of a high incidence of post-conflict trauma among the civilian population—but it highlights why the armed forces covenant is very important in Northern Ireland. It is perhaps more important in Northern Ireland than in some other parts of the United Kingdom, because it is essential that the men and women who have served our nation get the support that they require.

I am concerned, as a Member of Parliament, that I am dealing on a regular basis with veterans of Operation Banner who find themselves in trouble with the law because they have developed post-traumatic mental health problems and sadly get caught up in behavioural difficulties that perhaps are not entirely of their making but often result in them falling foul of the law. That is an increasing phenomenon, yet our mental health services do not appear to be adequately resourced to cope with it.

We feel that there is a need to do something. I know that my colleagues in the Northern Ireland Assembly have been pressing for a specialist and properly resourced unit to address some of the issues linked to mental health and what we call the troubles in Northern Ireland. Those who serve in the armed forces in particular need that support, and they are not getting the level of support that they require, so that is an important element of the armed forces covenant.

The current arrangements in Northern Ireland tend to vary from those in other parts of the United Kingdom, partly due to the constraints of our peculiar form of devolved government in Northern Ireland. The point is this: until just over a year ago, we had a power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland comprising two main parties, one being the Democratic Unionist party and the other being Sinn Féin, and frankly, Sinn Féin has a difficulty when it comes to the armed forces covenant. It has declined to recognise the covenant and the idea that it has a responsibility for implementing the covenant, and its Ministers in charge of Departments have at times resisted efforts on our part to see the very modest objectives of the covenant implemented in Northern Ireland.

I remind the House that the core principle of the covenant is to ensure that those who have served in our armed forces are not disadvantaged by virtue of that service when it comes to the provision of healthcare, housing, education and so on. It is not that they are given special treatment or that they are advantaged over the rest of society, but that they are not disadvantaged. Yet the attitude of Sinn Féin to our armed forces means that, frankly, they are being disadvantaged in Northern Ireland. They are not getting the support that they deserve and require when it comes to healthcare treatment.

I have recently dealt with cases in my own constituency of those who have served in the armed forces, but who are languishing on waiting lists—ever increasing waiting lists, sadly, in Northern Ireland—and cannot get access to treatment. When they seek to get treatment that could be available to them in other parts of the United Kingdom, they are told, “We will not fund your travel, and we will not fund your accommodation to have this treatment in Birmingham or Manchester”. They would be entitled to receive such treatment if they lived in, for example, the constituency of my colleague the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn). We believe that this issue needs to be addressed.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): Armed forces veterans and their families are an integral part of the community that I represent, and many of them served in Northern Ireland. They would like better provision of services for them in St Helens, but they certainly feel that the colleagues whom they served alongside in Northern Ireland should not be disadvantaged just because of where they live. Like me, they fully support the armed forces covenant being extended fully to Northern Ireland.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and, if I may say so, for the interest that he has taken over the years in matters pertaining to Northern Ireland and those who have served in the armed forces, which is greatly appreciated.

I want to give credit where it is due, and in fairness to the Government, we do have the Royal Irish Regiment aftercare service in Northern Ireland. It was established specifically to provide welfare support to those who have served in the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service. It is a valuable aftercare service, and it is valued by those who have benefited from it. The difficulty we have is that the life of the Royal Irish Regiment aftercare service is approaching its end date, and there is no indication from the Government that it will be renewed.

I am concerned about that, because the service provides valuable support to those who have served. As I have said, somewhere in the region of 55,000 to 60,000 veterans have served in the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service battalions. If we lose the Royal Irish Regiment aftercare service and the joined-up approach it brings to providing welfare support to veterans, that will increase the deficit in support for veterans in Northern Ireland. I look to the Government—I am happy to meet Ministers to discuss the need for this again—to extend the work of the Royal Irish Regiment aftercare service beyond the end of the period for which it was originally established.

If I may, I will concentrate a little more on what I see as the kernel of the problem. When the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was passed by this House, and by this Parliament, following the Belfast agreement, section 75 dealt with the whole issue of equality in Northern Ireland. It identifies a number of groupings within our society in Northern Ireland where there should be the promotion of equality of opportunity, including

“between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group...between men and women...between persons with a disability and persons without; and...between persons with dependants and persons without.”

I would like to see veterans of our armed forces added as a specific group to the list of those for whom it is a requirement of every Department in Northern Ireland to promote equality of opportunity. That would at least move us in the right direction of addressing the deficit by identifying veterans as a group that ought to be provided with support when they need it, and it would compel Ministers in Departments in Northern Ireland to act in accordance with the objectives of the armed forces covenant.

**Emma Little Pengelly** (Belfast South) (DUP): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one big benefit of adding that group to section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 is that it would introduce a requirement for every Government policy to be screened for its impact on that group? Whether it was an educational or health policy, there would be mandatory screening of its impact on armed forces personnel and their families. That would put policy makers across all Departments in a much more informed position to ensure that the needs of armed forces personnel and their families are integrated at the earliest possible opportunity in policy making.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** I regard my hon. Friend as an expert on this issue, having worked with her in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

[*Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson*]

She has devoted a lot of time and energy to promoting this kind of provision right across our society, not least in respect of veterans and the victims and survivors of our troubled past.

I refer the House to paragraph 36 of the Defence Committee report, “The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 1: Military Casualties”, which states:

“The provisions of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 prevents the Department of Health...and the Health and Social Care...sector in Northern Ireland in providing war veterans with priority over other individuals with respect to healthcare treatment.” The use of the term “priority” refers, of course, to ensuring that people are not disadvantaged by virtue of their service, rather than to jumping the waiting list queue—that is not what veterans are asking for. What veterans are asking for is not to be disadvantaged by virtue of their service. It is evident even in the findings of the Defence Committee that that happens. This is something that has been identified not just by the Democratic Unionist party but by other colleagues in this House.

**Lady Hermon:** It is very kind of the right hon. Gentleman to allow me to intervene again. He will know very well that we have the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and, quite separately from that, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Will he take a few moments to explain to the House whether either, or indeed both, of those commissions support the extension of section 75 to include veterans? That would be very helpful for the House.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** I thank the hon. Lady for that question. I have met the Equality Commission about this issue, but I am not sure that I have met the Human Rights Commission. As far as I am aware, they tend to take the view that they do not believe that section 75 presents the problem that we believe exists. However, I have ample evidence to support our view that it is an impediment, even if it is based on perception rather than reality. We believe that amending section 75 would clear up any question of ambiguity on this issue and offer clarity, as my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) said, on policy development across all Departments. We urge the Government to examine the potential to amend section 75 for that purpose.

I refer the House to the “Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant”, which stated that service personnel based in Northern Ireland

“are disadvantaged more than their contemporaries elsewhere... For example, Service families in the province are prevented from identifying themselves as such due to the security situation. This can cause difficulties for partners in explaining their career history to prospective employers and for Service children in obtaining the necessary support in schools”.

I have found that to be the case. I know that we have come a long way from the dark days of our troubled past, but there remains in Northern Ireland a culture of fear when it comes to openly identifying as someone who serves with the armed forces or as a family member of someone who does so. We cannot ignore that that is the reality of the experience of many serving personnel and veterans of the armed forces in Northern Ireland.

In addition, we believe there is substance in the call by many veterans in Northern Ireland for the establishment of a specialist facility to offer support to veterans. I commend, on behalf of my party, the excellent work of many of the military-linked charities in Northern Ireland. The Royal British Legion raises more money in Northern Ireland through its poppy appeal than any other region of the United Kingdom. We have SSAFA and Combat Stress, which does excellent work with limited resources while struggling to cope with the demand on its services. ABF the Soldiers’ Charity and others all do excellent work, but we would like to see a specialist facility established in Northern Ireland to bring together the resources needed to offer welfare support to veterans. That centre might be supported by some of the charities to which I have referred.

I want to make reference to community covenants in Northern Ireland. The Minister will know that they are an integral part of the armed forces covenant. I am delighted to report that since we last debated this issue in the House of Commons, a number of our new—not so new now, I suppose—district councils have adopted the community covenant, including Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council in my own constituency, and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. We welcome this development, because it means that local communities are now able to become more involved in providing support to the armed forces community and veterans. This will help to change the culture around our service personnel and veterans, and help them to see that the community is behind them, offering support at local government level.

I want to draw my remarks to a close by summarising what we would like the Government to do to ensure the full implementation of the armed forces covenant in Northern Ireland. I remind the House that this was part of the confidence and supply agreement between the Democratic Unionist party and the Conservative party. We identified full implementation of the armed forces covenant in Northern Ireland as a priority for the Government. In that context, I repeat our call for the aftercare service currently operated by the Royal Irish Regiment in Northern Ireland, a vital welfare support service for those who served in the Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Irish Regiment Home Service, to be extended, with consideration given to enhancing the level of support available to veterans in Northern Ireland who did not serve in the UDR and Royal Irish Home Service but who are equally deserving of welfare support.

Secondly, we want the Government to amend section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to make specific provision for veterans of our armed forces to ensure that Government Departments and agencies in Northern Ireland have to have regard to the needs of veterans in bringing forward and implementing policies. We believe that in the absence of a devolved Government, that is the right way forward to ensure Government Departments and agencies in Northern Ireland are delivering for veterans, and have a requirement to take account of the needs of veterans in developing their policies.

One of the reports commissioned by the former Prime Minister, on transitioning for veterans, recommended that the Government appoint an armed forces champion in Northern Ireland. I know that this has been talked about, but we would like to see the proposal taken

forward. We continue to encourage our local councils to adopt the community covenant. We hear so much about respect from our absent colleagues in Sinn Féin, but the councils in Northern Ireland dominated by Sinn Féin have yet to adopt the community covenant. I think that this disrespects the men and women from Northern Ireland who serve in our armed forces. If Sinn Féin wants to be taken seriously on respect, it could take this step. This does not require Stormont. It does not require an Assembly. It does not require an Executive. Every council on which Sinn Féin has a strong presence could, right now, bring forward a proposal to adopt the community covenant. That would show real respect to the men and women who serve in our armed forces.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure this afternoon to move this motion in the name of the Democratic Unionist party.

5.30 pm

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):**

Let me begin by congratulating the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) on his remarks. He is very much a champion for veterans in Northern Ireland, as indeed are so many of his party. His passion for this subject is well known and certainly came across in his speech. I join him in paying tribute to the enormous service and sacrifice of all the members of our armed forces from Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the absence of some colleagues. I say with the greatest respect to the shadow Labour Northern Ireland Ministers on the Front Bench that the absence of any shadow Defence Ministers has not gone unnoticed by the House. I am absolutely sure that that is not meant as any disrespect to the House. None the less it is a certain disappointment, considering the subject of our debate.

This year in particular, we remember the unparalleled contribution of Northern Ireland veterans to the spring offensive on the western front a century ago. We also recall their heroism in more recent operations, from the turmoil of the troubles to operations in Afghanistan and against Daesh extremists in Iraq. It has been my privilege to serve alongside many soldiers from Northern Ireland. Their passion and commitment has always been exemplary. As a reservist, I note with pride that more than twice as many Northern Irish citizens volunteer for the reserves, compared with the national average. For example, 502 Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force was only founded in 2012 but has grown rapidly to a strength of some 130. Alongside the other regular and reserve units across Northern Ireland, they embody the potent mix of our armed forces.

We are determined to ensure that all those who serve with our armed forces have the support that they need, from whatever part of the United Kingdom they come. In discussing these issues, we should start by recognising that veterans who live in Northern Ireland are entitled to receive the same level of support from the Ministry of Defence as those who live in England, Scotland and Wales. If any member of the armed forces, past or present, or their family wishes to access our recently launched veterans' gateway or our new freephone Combat Stress mental health helpline, they can do so.

As hon. Friends will be aware, the covenant is a promise not just from Defence, but from the whole Government on behalf of our nation. It is a recognition

that every part of our nation has a moral obligation to help those who lay their lives on the line for us—a duty to guarantee that no one who is serving, or who has served, for this country should suffer any disadvantage as a result of that service in relation to the rest of society. The covenant, however, is not prescriptive. Its voluntary nature means that there has never been a one-size-fits-all approach. Different parts of the country take a different approach, tailored to their particular circumstances. In the case of Northern Ireland, the covenant is being applied in a manner that suits the unique nature of its circumstances.

Four years on from the last time that we debated this subject, I am pleased to see that progress has been made, as the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley acknowledged. I had the great pleasure of visiting Northern Ireland twice last year, when I was the Minister responsible for veterans and personnel. I saw at first hand the needs of the armed forces community there and the commendable work being undertaken on behalf of our personnel. I also had the enormous pleasure of attending Armed Forces Day in the constituency of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), who has also been a sterling champion for veterans and members of the armed forces for many a year in Bangor.

**Lady Hermon:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way because it allows me to put on the record how delighted and proud we were that he was present in Northern Ireland, which is an integral part of the United Kingdom, for Armed Forces Day, and we hope he has kept the instructions on how to get back, because although the Prime Minister only has time to come occasionally, it is wonderful when MOD Ministers come and remind everyone there that Northern Ireland is indeed an integral part of the United Kingdom.

**Mark Lancaster:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady. I was actually in Northern Ireland a couple of weeks ago, as indeed was my right hon. Friend the veterans Minister, who was there for Remembrance Sunday.

Whether it is the work of the newly formed Veterans Support Office, operating in tandem with the Confederation of Service Charities to improve co-ordination between statutory bodies and service charities; the work of veterans champions, located in each of the 11 local authorities in Northern Ireland and linked with the VSO, tirelessly keeping the concerns of personnel in the community spotlight; or the work building on the bespoke aftercare service referred to by the right hon. Gentleman and provided by the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish, after referral from the Regional Personnel Recovery Unit within 38 (Irish) Brigade, there is plenty going on, but as we have heard, that is not to pretend that there are not still significant challenges to overcome.

When I visited Northern Ireland last March, I also had the sombre privilege of meeting some of those who had served during the troubles and, as a result, suffered from profound mental health issues. It is a reminder that for too many veterans living in Northern Ireland the scars of experience remain all too raw, as was equally highlighted by the right hon. Gentleman. That is why the MOD is supporting the Ulster University study, funded by the Forces in Mind Trust, into the needs of the Northern Ireland service community.

[*Mark Lancaster*]

At the same time, we know that there is a need to continue raising awareness of the help already out there and, in particular, the different ways to access funding. We have already seen the LIBOR veterans fund providing £600,000 for the Somme nursing home in Belfast, and small grants have been made to support community integration projects and recreation facilities for the armed forces community in Northern Ireland. By comparison with other parts of the UK, however, applications for covenant funding remain low. That is why we have committed to providing £300,000 over five years to improve the capacity and capability of local authorities and other bodies in Northern Ireland to bid for covenant funding.

Some hon. Members will feel we should go further still—some might suggest it is time to introduce further statutory instruments to increase uptake—but although I am ready to listen to the arguments on a case-by-case basis, I would make the point that the problem is not about the lack of mechanisms. Let us not forget, as has been mentioned, that besides the instruments already in place, there is section 75. I listened very carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman said, but it is a cornerstone of the Belfast agreement. It is about more than the avoidance of discrimination; it charges public authorities to actively seek ways to encourage greater equality of opportunity and good relations. It is the view of the Government that the armed forces covenant does not contravene section 75. As was highlighted by the exchange between the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for North Down, that is also the view of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** For the purpose of clarity, my contention is not that the armed forces covenant contravenes section 75; it is that Government Departments in Northern Ireland believe that implementing the covenant may contravene it. I believe, therefore, that adding veterans as a clear category in section 75 would provide the clarity required to put this beyond doubt.

**Mark Lancaster:** As ever, the right hon. Gentleman makes his point in a perfectly reasonable manner. He should be reassured that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was here when he made that point earlier, and I know that she took on board his comments. Perhaps, for now, he should seek some reassurance in that.

For me, even more important than the legal devices is the willingness of different groups across Northern Ireland—local authorities, businesses and the third sector—to come together and partner up. Slowly but surely, we are seeing that start to happen, but we need to accelerate the process and encourage different organisations to combine their resources and raise awareness of the help on offer. On that note, I should add that if Members are aware of any disadvantage suffered by members of the armed forces in Northern Ireland, they should report it to me or to colleagues in the Ministry of Defence so that we can attempt to address them quickly.

Let me reassure Members, and every single man and woman in our armed forces, that we are utterly committed and determined to ensure that all those who have contributed so much to our nation continue to receive

the support that they deserve. In the four years since our last debate, much has already improved, but today's debate will only spur us on in our quest to extend the protection of the covenant to all.

5.40 pm

**Owen Smith** (Pontypridd) (Lab): It is a great pleasure, and an honour, for me—as shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—to respond to the debate on behalf of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition. The fact that members of our defence team are not present implies no disrespect on the part of the Labour Front Bench. They will be coming along shortly, and I am sure that they will take great interest in the debate.

Let me make clear at the outset that we are 100% in favour of the armed forces covenant. It is an excellent measure, introduced by the present Government; they built on the superb work done by the previous Labour Government, whose initial military covenant was passed in 2000. It is an important part of the way in which we as a country acknowledge the excellent service, and sacrifice, of members of our armed forces, not only in Northern Ireland but all over the world. The Labour party is four-square behind it, and four-square behind its equal application throughout the United Kingdom.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson), who opened the debate so eloquently, for his consistent support for armed forces members and veterans, and for consistently raising the question of potential anomalies between the application of the covenant in Northern Ireland and its application in the rest of the United Kingdom, which he has done with great vigour and sincerity.

While I acknowledge the Minister's contention that there might be security and political reasons for the different application of the covenant in Northern Ireland—which echoed what has been said by previous Conservative Defence Ministers—the reality is that some differences are not just about security and politics. There are administrative and legal differences between the framework in Northern Ireland and the framework in the rest of the UK, and there is the question of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which was raised by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley and which I hope to address later in my speech.

It should also be borne in mind that there is a particular set of problems for some representatives of the armed forces. There are Northern Ireland veterans who went through traumatic times during their service, often related to the nature of the areas in which they served and the process of locating and relocating in communities. There are about 150,000 veterans in Northern Ireland, and the levels of post-traumatic stress disorder are higher than the average. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley made some good points about the need for more support for the mental health of veterans. I am sure that the Minister heard what he said and will acknowledge that there should be better support, not just in Northern Ireland but across the board.

The central point of the speech made by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley, however, was that section 75 of the 1998 Act militates against the equal application of the armed forces covenant in Northern Ireland. I know that the Government do not agree, and believe that the two are reconcilable. We share that view: we

believe that it is possible for the covenant to be applied properly in Northern Ireland, and for that to be reconciled with the proper application of section 75.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) asked the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley whether the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission took the view that section 75 needed to be amended to be consistent with the proper application of the covenant. The answer of course is that they do not take that view. They viewed it perfectly possible for the two things to be applied, and I know that because I had a meeting only this afternoon with the chief executive of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to discuss that very point. I further cite the view of a former Defence Minister, the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who has said that 93% of the armed forces covenant is being applied equitably in Northern Ireland.

I finally point to the view of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, because although we have not debated this issue in the House for four years, there was an excellent report by the Committee under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) that went into this issue in great detail. It assessed it and took a huge amount of evidence from all the bodies involved, and came to the conclusion that there are undoubtedly areas where specific policies applied in Great Britain are not implemented in Northern Ireland for the reasons I have mentioned—the legal, administrative, political and security differences—and other areas where there should be improvements, such as around access to IVF and mental health. I would be intrigued to know whether the Minister has anything to say about the changes to IVF cycles and the availability of them to former armed forces veterans, because the Government have previously promised to look at Northern Ireland versus elsewhere in that regard.

**Conor McGinn:** I have been robust in this House in my defence of the Good Friday agreement, and very occasionally my interpretation of it is slightly different from that of my hon. Friends from Northern Ireland, but on this matter I am very clear: not only is there not a contradiction between the full implementation of the armed forces covenant in Northern Ireland and the Good Friday agreement, but the logical outworking of the spirit of the Good Friday agreement is that veterans, their families and serving personnel are looked after.

**Owen Smith:** Of course, and equality is central to the Good Friday agreement, which is why it is so important that the armed forces covenant, which makes it clear that no armed forces personnel or their families should be in any way disadvantaged by virtue of their currently serving in, or having been in, the armed forces, must not in any way be out of keeping with the application of equalities legislation—section 75 in particular—which is absolutely critical to the underpinning of the Good Friday agreement. That is why I am so pleased to hear the Minister repeat the Government's view that they do not think there is any need to amend section 75 because they believe the two things are entirely reconcilable.

**Lady Hermon:** Given the hon. Gentleman's obvious support—and, I take it, his party's support—for the military covenant throughout the United Kingdom and

indeed for community covenants, I am curious about what is said when he meets representatives of Sinn Féin; I am quite sure he meets Sinn Féin MPs when they visit Portcullis House and Westminster, although they do not take their seats here. How often has the hon. Gentleman raised the military covenant and urged Sinn Féin to show more respect for the military covenant and the community covenant?

**Owen Smith:** I do, obviously, regularly meet all the political parties in Northern Ireland, including Sinn Féin, and I have raised the question of the military covenant and the perception that insufficient respect is paid to members of the armed forces in the way in which the community covenant in particular is applied, and I will continue to raise that in my conversations with Sinn Féin.

In conclusion, I shall refer the House to a few important remarks made in evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on this question. It had much greater opportunity to debate this issue at length. One of those important pieces of evidence came from the former Northern Ireland Executive Minister Edwin Poots MLA of the Democratic Unionist party. He said that he took the view that

“no one is supposed to be treated better, and indeed, no one is supposed to be treated worse. Army personnel will not then be treated any worse than anybody else”,

making it clear that the point about the covenant is to guarantee that there is no disadvantage to armed services personnel in Northern Ireland or elsewhere.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** I thank the shadow Northern Ireland Secretary for giving way. I appreciate his comments. May I quote from a letter dated 15 December 2016 from the most recent Health Minister in Northern Ireland, Michelle O'Neill, who is now the leader of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland? She wrote:

“The Armed Forces Covenant has been adopted by England, Scotland and Wales, to provide equal access to health care where it can be linked to military service, serving personnel, their families and those who leave the Military Forces. The Covenant has not been adopted here”—

meaning Northern Ireland—

“as health care arrangements are delivered on an equitable basis to all members of the community.”

That is a clear reference—I asked the Minister about this—to section 75. With the greatest of respect to the shadow Secretary of State, Sinn Féin's view is that the armed forces covenant has not been adopted and that section 75 excludes its implementation.

**Owen Smith:** I can say with equal clarity to the right hon. Gentleman that the leader of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland is wrong in that regard, because the armed forces covenant has been adopted in Northern Ireland and should be implemented. The Opposition are clear about that.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** Will the shadow Secretary of State give way?

**Owen Smith:** I will give way one more time and then draw my remarks to a conclusion.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** I feel the need to say strongly that the armed forces covenant has not been formally adopted in Northern Ireland. I was a special adviser in the First Minister's office, working with Executive colleagues,

[*Emma Little Pengelly*]

and I sat down with and repeatedly asked Sinn Féin for the covenant to go on the Executive's agenda and for it to be agreed. Sinn Féin refused time and again, not for any logical reason and not on the basis of equality, but due to its historical opposition to the British armed forces. I sat there and had those conversations. The armed forces covenant has not been formally adopted in Northern Ireland.

**Owen Smith:** The point is that this is clearly a politicised and, at some level, a political issue. Clearly, points are being scored on both sides of the divide in Northern Ireland. The key point I want to make is that the Government's view, which we share, is that—

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

**Owen Smith:** I am going to draw my remarks to a conclusion. The point is that 90% or so of the covenant is being applied properly in Northern Ireland, but there are some gaps. I have raised some with the Minister, and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley has raised others. Mental health needs to be considered in particular.

In practical terms, the view expressed repeatedly to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee when it assessed the situation is that the reality is that no material disadvantage is being suffered by veterans in Northern Ireland. In support of that conclusion, Colonel Richard Gordon of SSAFA said to the Committee that he did not think that there any disadvantages to the armed forces community in Northern Ireland in respect of the covenant, and Brian Maguire of the Royal British Legion said:

"I cannot point to a single case, in all the cases we have dealt with in our time, where I can say for sure that the individual would have been better treated had they been living elsewhere in the United Kingdom."

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley mentioned what an important institution the Royal British Legion is in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, and I completely support him. Alongside SSAFA, it is one of the most important organisations providing support to veterans, and it does not support the conclusions that he drew in his remarks. The Royal British Legion supports the conclusions that I draw, and we need the covenant to be implemented properly. I therefore support the Government in not changing section 75, because it is entirely consistent with the application of the covenant to Northern Ireland.

5.53 pm

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): I welcome this debate and the speech of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson). It was hard to disagree with anything that he had to say, because he reminded us of the sacrifice of veterans across the UK, including in Northern Ireland. When we think about veterans, particularly on the mainland, we often tend to conjure up visions of either those brave warriors who defended us during the second world war, many of whom I am glad to say are still with us, or the younger men and women who served more recently in Afghanistan and Iraq. We sometimes tend to forget about the many other conflicts in which we have been involved, such as Korea, the Falklands, Bosnia and, of course, Northern Ireland. I am not an expert, but that must have been one

of the most difficult experiences of all, because many of the reservists to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred were living with the threat of violence 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

There are people in this House who have served on frontlines around the world. I have never done so, but I imagine that being on active service must be incredibly stressful. Once that six-month tour of duty finishes, however, perhaps people can start to relax again, but that was not the case for so many people in Northern Ireland, particularly those who lived there. We have a particular debt of gratitude to all of them and to the right hon. Gentleman for raising the issue.

I feel very strongly about this issue. I am the Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee, which initiated an inquiry into the care of veterans in Wales and looked at the armed forces covenant. I believe that the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) was a member of the Committee at the time, so he will be aware of the report. It was a good report, because it showed that good practice was going on across the whole of the United Kingdom. There is no room to make any political points in that regard. We visited Scotland and met Keith Brown, a Scottish National party Member of the Scottish Parliament who is himself a former member of the Royal Marines. He spoke about the very good work that was being done in Scotland. Local authorities in Wales, led by all political parties, also support the armed forces covenant. We heard evidence from the then Labour Minister, and since then we have heard positive statements from the current Labour Minister, Mark Drakeford. A lot of good practice is going on across the United Kingdom.

I will briefly remind Members of some of our report's conclusions. We thought that the one-stop shops for veterans in Scotland were an extremely good idea and that they could be considered in Northern Ireland and Wales. We heard evidence that those who had been moving around on service were sometimes disadvantaged when making an application for social housing. We heard about veterans experiencing problems getting paperwork transferred from the Ministry of Defence to their NHS. I say "their" NHS because there are, of course, four different ones across the United Kingdom, which can add to the problem. I hope that the Minister will look at that. People also have problems getting their children into school because they do not live in the catchment area. For those and many other reasons, it is very important that we implement all aspects of the armed forces covenant right across the United Kingdom.

I have a few, not complaints or criticisms, but thoughts. I do not want them to be seen as in any way critical of what the Government are doing, because overall I think they are doing very well. There were three things that worried me a little when we undertook that inquiry. The first is the definition of "veteran". Under the current terminology, I could define myself as an armed forces veteran, having spent about 18 months in the Territorial Army in the late 1980s, during which time I am afraid I did not do anything of any great note, other than run around the Brecon Beacons on a Sunday evening and enjoy a cheap pint afterwards. Yes, it is a worthy enough thing to do, but at that time there was no suggestion that the TA would ever be called up to active service, as is now the case.

People who spend a few months in the Army, perhaps without even completing their basic training, can come out and call themselves veterans. I am not really comfortable with that—I do not think that it is absolutely right—although it would be rather difficult to pin down an exact definition, because there are people who have spent less than 12 months in the Army who may have been on active service, and they certainly should qualify. Perhaps we need to think about that.

Secondly—this came to me partly because of the definition issue—I am concerned about some of the charities currently working with armed forces veterans. I hasten to add that I do not mean those mentioned by hon. Members today, including the Royal British Legion, Combat Stress and SSAFA, which are excellent charities. I have certain concerns, however, about some that have been set up by people who are well-meaning but who do not have the relevant experience, and I am afraid that others have been set up by people who are trying to cash in on public support for the armed forces. I am currently involved in what could become a criminal prosecution, having challenged people who were in combat clothing—one of them had spent a few months in the Army and the other had not—who had links to an unpleasant, so-called far-right organisation, and who were collecting money in my hometown of Monmouth during the remembrance period. I am very concerned that some organisations that are setting themselves up as charities for armed forces veterans may have sinister connections to extremist political groups or may simply be trying to make money—or some combination of the two. That needs to be looked at, and I am not certain the Charity Commission and Cobseo are doing enough to crack down on it.

My other concern goes back to the definition of “veteran”. We rightly use that term to define anyone who has served in any branch of the armed forces, but other people, particularly in Northern Ireland, also ought to qualify. Obviously, I refer to members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, but I also refer to the forgotten service—those who have worked in the Prison Service. They also face and have faced violence and intimidation on a regular basis, and would be worthy of some of the care we are suggesting should go to members of the armed forces.

I do not want to make any criticisms of any Government or any political party in this debate. I welcome the fact that the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley has secured it, and I hope that all the issues he has raised today will be properly addressed by the Government. I am confident that with today’s two Ministers, both of whom have very relevant experience of the armed forces, those concerns will be addressed.

6.1 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) on his passionate, knowledgeable speech, which kicked off this afternoon’s debate. I declare an interest: my husband was an officer in Her Majesty’s Royal Navy. I have mentioned that many times before, but I probably have not mentioned that he is an Ulsterman.

**Jim Shannon:** It took an Ulsterman to win her heart.

**Carol Monaghan:** He was a very special Ulsterman.

The armed forces covenant is a statement of the moral obligation that exists between the nations of the UK, the Government and the armed forces. It was enshrined in law for the first time in 2011. Specifically, it outlines two core principles. The first is that current or former members of the armed forces, or their families,

“should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.”

The second is that:

“Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for...the injured and the bereaved.”

However, as the Armed Forces Act 2011 does not create legally enforceable rights for service personnel, across the UK it remains a statement of intent rather than a statement of action. It is a statement of intent to which members of the armed forces have no recourse, so we are letting service personnel down.

The right hon. Gentleman described the particular culture that prevents members of the armed forces and veterans in Northern Ireland from identifying themselves. I have experienced that personally when visiting Ulster with my husband and having to check under our car for devices, so I appreciate the situation we are talking about. The right hon. Gentleman described in some detail the fact that although many charities work with veterans in Northern Ireland, a lack of funding and a lack of transparency in some places with the veterans means there are serious issues. However, I believe this is part of a wider problem across the UK.

We welcome the progress that has been made with the new ministerial covenant and veterans board. In recent years, society has become far more aware and more understanding of the effects of military service on the health, mental and physical, of those who choose to serve, and on their relationships with their families and communities. However, it must be recognised that for veterans in Northern Ireland very particular circumstances apply, and for local councils to show reluctance to fully implement the armed forces covenant is simply letting these veterans down.

Veterans are an asset to society, and they deserve our thanks respect and support. In Scotland alone, every year approximately 1,800 men and women complete their military service and settle in our communities, many with their families. We have an ambition to make Scotland the destination of choice for service leavers and their families. For almost a decade, the Scottish Government’s Scottish veterans fund has made a real difference to the lives of the armed forces community in Scotland and has provided £1.1 million to a host of veterans and ex-service charities that offer advice, help and support. There is no doubt that that lead should be followed by other UK nations.

In Northern Ireland, there has been long-standing criticism of the lack of implementation of the armed forces covenant. We are of course all sensitive to the tensions that still exist in parts of Northern Ireland, particularly in respect of the Army, but that must not be used to avoid providing the service that personnel and veterans deserve and require. While I am talking about tensions, I wish to mention the outstanding work that has been done to break down barriers in respect of policing in Northern Ireland. The transition from the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Police Service

[Carol Monaghan]

of Northern Ireland has enabled the police in Northern Ireland to have a more inclusive outlook and to be widely accepted in every sector of society.

Members of the republican nationalist community serve with distinction in the RAF and the Royal Navy. For some, though, the Army is still viewed with suspicion. A recruitment drive aimed at alienated communities would undoubtedly improve diversity and community representation in the Army. With movement on this issue, I believe that cross-party support for personnel and veterans would increase—that is, of course, if power-sharing is ever restored.

Much of this debate goes beyond Northern Ireland. What makes this issue infuriating is the voicelessness of personnel and veterans. We believe that personnel should be properly represented in the military and among defence policy decision makers. An armed forces representative body that is on a statutory footing is the norm for many other countries, including Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany. Such a representative body would give voice to our armed forces and would be able to liaise directly with the Government and ensure that personnel and veterans throughout the UK are central to defence thinking. That would be a major step forward for personnel across the UK and would give a much stronger voice to veterans in Northern Ireland.

The UK Government should honour the armed forces covenant tenet of “no disadvantage”. The covenant commits the UK Government to removing, where possible, disadvantage experienced as a result of service, and that includes for serving personnel and veterans in Northern Ireland.

6.8 pm

**Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) on bringing this debate to the House. I agree with the Minister for the Armed Forces that the right hon. Gentleman’s speech was passionate and thoughtful, and I enjoyed sitting through it. He was correct to pay tribute to the reserve forces in Northern Ireland, and I pay tribute to those in the reserve forces throughout the United Kingdom. He also mentioned how the Royal British Legion in Northern Ireland raised more money for the poppy appeal than any other part of the UK. I took that as a challenge, because we Scots do not like to be beaten at many things, so perhaps in future the Royal British Legion in Scotland will engage in a bit of healthy competition with its Northern Ireland counterpart.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) mentioned the sparse attendance in the Chamber today. If I exclude myself, perhaps I can suggest that what is important is quality rather than quantity. At least every part of the United Kingdom has been represented in the debate, which is very positive.

The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) spoke about his Welsh Affairs Committee’s visit to Scotland and the work it did there. He was right to highlight the good work that is being done in Scotland. I will focus my remarks on the good work that is done both Scotland-wide and particularly in Moray.

The armed forces covenant is taken very seriously in my constituency, which has had a significant military footprint for many decades. Like other speakers so far

in this debate, I want to put it on record that our personnel and our veterans do outstanding service. We in this place should never tire of highlighting and praising what they have done and continue to do for their country.

I was delighted when, in October last year, Jo Lenihan was appointed armed forces covenant development officer serving the Moray and Highland military communities. Moray and Highland Councils are to be congratulated on joining forces to secure the post, which is funded by the Ministry of Defence’s covenant fund. As the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) said, the covenant is to fulfil the Government’s promise to those serving and those who have served that they and their families are guaranteed to be treated fairly.

As Members will know, Moray has provided a home to the 39 Engineer Regiment at Kinloss barracks since 2012, when the Army took over the base from the RAF. Further east along the coast, RAF Lossiemouth is one of the UK’s two RAF quick reaction alert stations. It is the base for three Typhoon combat aircraft squadrons and an RAF regiment. From 2020, Lossiemouth will also be the host to the new P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft operated by two historic squadrons: 120 squadron was originally an anti-submarine unit in world war two, while the origins of 201 squadron date back to the first world war.

I will focus my remarks in today’s debate on the incredibly strong links between the armed forces community and the wider community in Moray, and that is what Jo Lenihan is working hard on to strengthen even further. [Interruption.] I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was not sure whether you were confused by what I was saying.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that this debate is about the armed forces covenant in Northern Ireland. He is probably making the link between Moray and Northern Ireland, but I am sure that he will want to focus back on the subject of this debate.

**Douglas Ross:** Absolutely. I will take the hint, Madam Deputy Speaker. Whenever a referee looks confused at you, you know there is something wrong. I take that glare in the way that it was intended. What I hope to do in my short remarks is to explain how successful our covenant has been in Moray and why I understand that DUP Members want that success to be replicated in Northern Ireland.

In Moray, the links begin with the youngest members of our community—I hope that that can be replicated in Northern Ireland. Only a week ago, 39 Engineer Regiment hosted pupils from Forres Academy and Kinloss Primary School.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)**  
*rose—*

**Douglas Ross:** I will give way, although I am worried.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil:** Let me help the hon. Gentleman relate his speech to Ireland. The original derivation of the word “Elgin”, which is in his constituency, is actually “little Ireland”. So there you go—some help there.

**Douglas Ross:** I have been in this place for about nine months and that is the first helpful contribution that I have had from a Scottish National party Member. It may be another nine months or nine years before another one comes along, but it is great to have Elgin mentioned in this place.

We have also had 280 Moray schoolchildren attending a world war one centenary roadshow run by a national charity. As in other parts of the country, armed forces personnel also make huge contributions to many voluntary organisations. It is important that we remember that, when the original armed forces community covenant for Moray was signed in 2012, that was when we welcomed the Army to Kinloss barracks. As a sign of our commitment in Moray—again, it would happen in Northern Ireland—that was re-signed in October 2016. It is important to quote the words that were said by the then convenor of Moray Council at that time, because it sums up what the armed forces covenant means in Moray, Scotland and across every part of the United Kingdom. At that signing ceremony, he said:

“This is an auspicious day for Moray. Senior representatives from all the public sectors in Moray and the military have come together to declare our continued support for the close ties and friendship between the armed forces at our two bases and the communities... The armed forces covenant is tangible proof of how our armed forces and everyone in Moray are all part of the same community, helping and supporting each other.”

That is what we want in every part of the United Kingdom.

The bonds that link our service communities in Moray with the wider area have always been strong, but the armed forces covenant has strengthened them even further. That is why I support the motion tabled by the DUP today. It is right that we recognise the valuable contribution to our armed forces of the men and women from Northern Ireland, including some of the best recruited reserve units in the UK. The final words of the motion are the most important: that this House

“reaffirms its commitment to ensure that the Armed Forces Covenant”—

which we enjoy in Moray and in Scotland—

“is fully implemented in Northern Ireland.”

6.14 pm

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross). His assessment was very interesting, and I was glad when he managed to get Northern Ireland into his speech, even though he had to get some help from the SNP. Everybody has their problems.

Our present day Government have a duty of care, and of course admiration, for each and every member of Her Majesty’s armed forces. Within their remit, it is vital that care and support is given to those who continue to live with the scars and the pains of bygone conflicts. In Northern Ireland, of course, we are all too aware of the pains of battle and what members of the armed forces faced during the years of struggle against the republican army. The military covenant is a real and genuine opportunity for the Government to show their gratitude to all who fought for the cause. Our nation has a moral obligation of support to our military members, and I am proud to say that right across the United Kingdom, people are continuing to fulfil that obligation.

In my constituency of Upper Bann, we had many losses over the years. From the 11th Battalion that was stationed in the constituency, we lost 16 soldiers. The Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment lost somewhere in the region of 205—the breakdown of that is 198 UDR and seven RIR—and 66 or 67 former members were killed, I think. In Northern Ireland 722 soldiers were killed by terrorists. Of course, on top of that we have members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, now the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and other forces. Some 6,116 were wounded. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) pointed out, some 300,000 soldiers served over that period in Northern Ireland.

The House can understand in just how much affection the people of Northern Ireland and the people on these Northern Ireland Benches hold our Crown forces today. Over the many years of troubles in Northern Ireland, the men and women of Ulster were never found wanting when it came to donning the uniform of the Crown forces. They knew duty had to be done, and they did it to defend the whole of the United Kingdom, right across the United Kingdom including, of course, Northern Ireland, with the troubles, but also even further afield, into Afghanistan and Iraq, where many were traumatised over the years.

Let me remind the House that there are Members of Parliament who disregard this covenant and have absolutely no desire to see its full implementation in Northern Ireland. Despite their objection, Sinn Féin cannot build the courage to stand before us in this Chamber and explain exactly why. That attitude fails to represent the voices of constituents who support the covenant and it fails to fulfil the overall obligation that we have to support our servicemen and women.

One key area of the covenant that I want to draw attention to is the importance of transition. I am sure that other hon. Members will touch on it; some have already done so. I have no doubt that this House recognises that the transition from service back into civilian life is a process that can often pose mental barriers for both the serviceman or woman and their family. Support for mental health care patients is a key issue that I have sought to address in my constituency of Upper Bann.

It never ceases to disturb me when I hear some of the stories of those who are struggling with mental illness. Across Northern Ireland, we face ever increasing numbers of mental health cases, and our healthcare professionals and support organisations are struggling to meet the demand, as we heard earlier. However, an ever greater concern is the many patients who think they can deal with their mental health problems and attempt to provide their own remedy of recovery. As we all know, this can often lead to dangerous, harrowing and tragic circumstances.

Many of our heroes will finish their service without physical injury or long-term damage, but in the months and years ahead, the scars and reality of battle can so often return with even greater effect. If fully implemented, the covenant would provide the training, education, healthcare referrals and appropriate career support for all those going through that transition period.

In closing, and on behalf of my constituents in Upper Bann, I re-emphasise my support for the full implementation of the armed forces covenant. I appeal to the Government to honour their commitment of care

[David Simpson]

to the servicemen and women who have given so much for this nation. It was mentioned that about 90% of the covenant is implemented. It has not been implemented in full in Northern Ireland as it has been in the rest of the United Kingdom. There is a point of principle here. Why are the servicemen and women who have sacrificed so much over the years in Northern Ireland being discriminated against, as British citizens, when every other part of the United Kingdom has the armed forces covenant? I hope and trust that in the not-too-distant future we will see it implemented in full.

6.21 pm

**Paul Girvan** (South Antrim) (DUP): It is a great privilege to speak this afternoon on a motion brought forward by my party. I feel honoured to do so, but we must also remember that, as has already been stated, 763 members of the military lost their lives during Operation Banner in Northern Ireland. More than 300 members of the RUC also lost their lives, with 6,116 injured—that is, physical injuries, never mind the tens of thousands suffering from mental illness that has occurred because of what they went through, along with their families, who probably suffer equally.

As has been stated, the difficulty we have in Northern Ireland is that there are those who oppose the full implementation of the armed forces covenant. They are not just the enemies of Northern Ireland, but the enemies of Great Britain. They are the people who would rejoice in and commemorate the killings, 30 years ago this month, of two soldiers, Corporals David Howes and Derek Wood, by the IRA during a campaign to do with the hunger strikes. That was a marked point in the history of Northern Ireland. The same people who would condone those people do not seem to recognise that those who were killed in Gibraltar got—I will use the term—their just deserts. Those who were there as enemies of the state were taken out by those who deemed that they there to create havoc. I can tell you, those are the enemies of Ulster.

There are families who have not been recognised, nor had the opportunity to access services, not just in housing but in healthcare and everything else. Many areas need full implementation, and one of them relates to vacant property. Many men went away as reservists, serving their Queen and country in Afghanistan and Iraq, and still had to pay rates on the properties that they occupied. That is not the case in the rest of the United Kingdom. Those areas need to be brought in line.

I do not believe that we as a country go far enough even in recognising our military. When I am in the United States, I see with pride the way they treat their military and those who have served their country. They learned their lesson after the Vietnam war, when men came back and were treated as outcasts. We as a country need to learn from what has happened in the United States. People there have turned a corner; they recognise their military. They make it evident that they appreciate what the military have done for their country. Military personnel do not go to the back of the line; they come to the front.

It is vital that we do not put these people to the back of the line. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) said, those

who are waiting on medical treatment and have to come across to the United Kingdom for treatment because of their injuries are not getting preferential treatment. I have a friend who lost both his legs in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, when he has to come over for treatment, he has to pay for his journey across. That needs to be looked at. As a country, we should be proud to go the second mile. We should not just state that we have a military covenant, but should go the second mile and give the military preferential treatment.

I disagree with what some people are saying, because section 75 of the Act implementing the Belfast agreement was to protect minorities. An amendment was made to it that includes the word “Travellers”—I stand to be corrected, but I believe that Travellers get a special mention in section 75. Lord Ashcroft did a review into the military in 2014, and I want to see the military and those who served within our security forces in Northern Ireland get the same recognition, with the same amendment made for them.

I see the House as widely united on this issue. It is great to see that we have brought a little bit of civility between the SNP and the Conservatives. Let us see if we can foster that and move it forward. I am probably not speaking to the converted, but we will try our best. It is great to see that our motion has the support of the House. Let us bring forward in Northern Ireland a full implementation of the armed forces covenant.

6.27 pm

**Emma Little Pengelly** (Belfast South) (DUP): I rise to support the motion and am very grateful for the opportunity to do so. I welcome the fact that the Democratic Unionist party leader, the right hon. Arlene Foster, has been able to join us to observe the debate.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): She’s just leaving!

**Emma Little Pengelly**: I think I have literally chased her away, unfortunately.

Northern Ireland, as a number of Members across the House have outlined, has a long and proud record of service in our British armed forces. I wish to add my voice to all those in the Chamber who have paid tribute to that service and sacrifice by so many. Indeed, not only Northern Ireland but pre-partition Ireland had a very proud record of those who served in our British armed forces from across both communities.

In my maiden speech, I referred to one of those men: my own great-grandfather, James Sandford, who, coming from pre-partition Ireland, fought at not only the Somme but Messines and was injured in Ypres—shot in the chest—and survived. I also would like to refer to my grandfather, Joseph Little, who served during world war two and was one of the men evacuated off the beaches at Dunkirk.

I mention those details first because I am incredibly proud of my family history and my grandfather and great-grandfather and all those who served, and secondly because it took me until this stage in my life to take a look into the details of my ancestors’ service. It is incredibly important for not only my generation but younger generations to take time to look into their family histories and learn about the incredible service that these people put in to defend our democracy and the great United Kingdom over the years.

I understand that, as has already been mentioned, Northern Ireland has the highest number of soldiers per head of population in any part of the United Kingdom. We contribute disproportionately to the British armed forces, and I am incredibly proud of that. It is not just about the money raised in the poppy appeal and the incredible things that people do on the ground to raise that money, it is about that disproportionate contribution to the armed forces. We are very proud of that fact at all levels across Northern Ireland.

In our work on the armed forces covenant, we have estimated that the combination of the higher proportional contribution to the British armed forces with Operation Banner, the presence of security forces in Northern Ireland and recruitment to the UDR, including the part-time UDR, means that approximately a third of all people in Northern Ireland had served in some capacity, were an immediate family member of somebody who had served or were a grandparent or grandchild of somebody who had served. That is an incredible statistic when we consider that Northern Ireland is still a divided society, where the vast majority of the volunteers—those who go into the reserves or the armed forces—are from one side of the community, although I welcome the fact that that is changing and we are seeing interest from both sides.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** My hon. Friend provides me with an opportunity to recall a visit I made to Camp Bastion in Helmand province in Afghanistan—we were visiting the First Battalion the Royal Irish Regiment, which was on operational deployment. I met soldiers from Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Dublin who were serving in our armed forces. I have to say that they had the Irish tricolour on display alongside the Ulster banner, demonstrating that people from both traditions serve in the UK armed forces, which we very much welcome.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention.

In my constituency of Belfast South, not only do we have many people who have served and continue to serve, but two units of the reserves are based there: on Sunnyside Street, there is a unit of the Army Medical Services—253 (North Irish) Medical Regiment—and on Hospital Road in Hydebank we have A Squadron of the Army Medical Services, 204 (North Irish) Field Hospital. I pay tribute to all the reserves who serve in that way. I know that many of them have incredibly stressful and busy full-time jobs, but they still find the time to join the reserves and to serve, providing the incredibly valuable expertise in the medical field that, sadly, is so necessary at times. It is an incredible thing that they do, and I pay tribute to them.

I want to focus on the outstanding issue of the application and implementation of the armed forces covenant in Northern Ireland. Many in this House are fully aware of the particular challenges, which have been discussed many times, facing our armed forces personnel not only when they are serving but particularly when they leave the armed forces. That is of course the same for those in Northern Ireland, but I want to pick up on two issues: the educational challenges facing the families of serving armed forces personnel, particularly their children; and mental health.

In Northern Ireland, as in the NHS across the UK, services are under huge pressure. We all know why, and we have heard many of the reasons for that. Sadly, however, in Northern Ireland we have had decades of historical underfunding, particularly for mental health services. Yet along with that historical underfunding, we have particularly high and growing levels of mental health needs. Indeed, I understand that we have the highest levels of mental health challenges and needs across the UK.

We have examined the challenges facing Northern Ireland, and we know that some groups are proportionally more likely to face mental health challenges during their lifetime. They include people who experience poverty, particularly transgenerational poverty, and young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. In addition—this is particular to Northern Ireland—there are the victims of the troubles and those who serve in the armed forces. The point I am trying to put across is that mental health is a particular challenge for Northern Ireland because we have higher numbers in both those categories.

In relation to victims and survivors, some of the areas that suffered most acutely during the troubles were urban, built-up areas. The constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) had the highest number of shootings and murders during the troubles. A huge number of people were impacted by that. We know from the evidence that people who lived in close proximity to those things, or who were directly impacted by them because they or a family member was the victim of violence, tend to have significantly higher levels of mental illness. There is a need to do more for victims of the conflict, and we are looking at that.

Connected to that, many of the victims were people who served in the armed forces. As my colleagues have outlined, a significant percentage of the victims served in the likes of the part-time RUC, the RUC, the part-time UDR and the British armed forces. Although we try to deal with some of that in Northern Ireland through our victims and survivors provision, we need much higher levels of mental health provision because of our armed forces personnel.

**Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the reference she made to my constituency, the legacy of the troubles and the service of so many veterans over the years. One reason why we have such high rates of mental health problems and suicide in Belfast, and north Belfast in particular, is the legacy of the troubles and the service of so many and what they have gone through. I am very grateful to her for highlighting that issue.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention.

The higher levels of victims and armed forces personnel in Northern Ireland put particular pressure on our services, in particular the NHS in Northern Ireland, which in turn has an even greater detrimental impact on soldiers who are just coming out of the armed forces now, who are trying to cope with a range of challenges from depression right through to post-traumatic stress disorder. A number of pieces of research have been commissioned that indicate that the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder is considerably higher in Northern

[*Emma Little Pengelly*]

Ireland and that the rate of those who suffer from it is much higher among those who served in the troubles or who have recently left the armed forces. That is incredibly challenging for our health service to deal with.

I also want to touch on education. I want to pick up on how the lack of the full implementation of the armed forces covenant has a detrimental impact in Northern Ireland. I was in the Northern Ireland Assembly before I came to this place, where I created and chaired the all-party group on tackling educational underachievement. One category we looked at that faced particular challenges was the children of serving armed forces personnel or those who had recently left the armed forces. That was due to a number of factors, such as the frequency of moves between different schools and young people coming into school as a late starter or late restarter.

That is why I want to make reference to the comments of the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I care deeply about trying to make sure that those young people get full support, along with a number of other categories, such as young people on free school meals. It was absolutely clear from the research that those young people suffered disadvantage. In spite of that evidence, I could not get Sinn Féin to agree to implement the armed forces covenant and take action on these matters. The shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland referred to political point scoring. I do not say things to score political points, but I will always stand up and call out those who are in the wrong. It was absolutely wrong for Sinn Féin to refuse to implement the armed forces covenant at Executive level and to refuse to implement the community covenant at local council level where it has the power to veto. We need to be absolutely accurate about this, because that is exactly what is happening. Some Departments and agencies are clearly indicating that they are going ahead with implementation and are trying to support people in recognition of the objective needs of our armed forces personnel, but setting a policy of the formal adoption of the armed forces covenant would send a clear message across all levels of government.

As I indicated earlier, I had the privilege of working as a special adviser at the heart of government for almost 10 years. I sat on many cross-departmental and cross-agency boards, project boards and programme boards, looking at the development and implementation of policy. The biggest barrier to the effective implementation of policy and the effective dealing with identified problems was the lack of a clear policy on a top-down basis.

**Nigel Dodds:** My hon. Friend is making a very eloquent and powerful speech. Would it not be incumbent on the shadow Secretary of State to correct the record when he said that the armed forces covenant had been adopted in Northern Ireland? He did not respond to that point earlier and it would be good if it was put on the record.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. I hope the shadow Secretary of State will take that opportunity, having accused anybody who has tried to stand up, and say very clearly, "I was there, I have had those conversations." This is not about attacking Sinn Féin. This is not about political point

scoring. This is about calling people out. It is a fact that we could not get it implemented at Executive level, so it was never formally adopted. Where individual Departments, individuals or agencies wanted to implement it, they did so, but there was no broad adopted policy to ensure that it happened. There was no accountability in relation to that.

Another point worth mentioning briefly relates to the community covenant. Again, this is a fact and I ask the shadow Secretary of State to take a look at it. Where there is a Sinn Féin-dominated council, Sinn Féin refuses to adopt the community covenant. That means there is a differential in terms of impact. There is a variation in the policy set to officials and others who implement policy.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady is addressing the House with considerable eloquence, but I express the cautious optimism that she is approaching her peroration.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am indeed.

In conclusion, despite what we have heard about the good work by third sector organisations, some councils and some Departments, clear policy needs to be set down at all levels. That has not happened and we want it to happen. We will continue to ask the Government to intervene to make sure that there is the full adoption of the armed forces covenant as soon as possible, so that no matter where our armed forces personnel live across the United Kingdom, they can receive the full protections and support they need.

6.43 pm

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I have listened to the debate with great interest. I compliment the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) on a most interesting opening speech.

I hope I will not try the patience of Ulster Members by talking about Northern Ireland, but, as I have told Members before, my wife comes from the city of Armagh, very near the border with the Republic. We were married in the darkest days of the troubles. Sadly, the thump of bombs and the crack of high velocity weapons is, even as a highlander, no strange sound. A number of friends of my wife's family were killed in the troubles and both her brothers, as I have told this Chamber before, served in the UDR. The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) talked about shining a torch under the car to check for a bomb. That brought back a memory of asking one of my brothers-in-law what on earth he was doing as he did just that and he replied, "Looking for a bomb." When sitting in the passenger seat beside a man like that and he turns the engine on—I actually put my fingers in my ears, because I was not sure whether I was about to meet my maker. The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) talked about the strain and that is exactly what it was all about. It was tough going. These were brave guys and girls who did their bit for their country.

Just to lighten up slightly, let me share two anecdotes. First, I remember when as a foolhardy young married man, I went exploring into south Armagh, which was bandit country, and inevitably, I got lost. Very near the County Monaghan border with the Republic, I remember

noticing something lying beside the road—this wee lane, in fact—and I got out and examined it. It was a circular disc of aluminium with spikes coming out of it. I then realised that it was the bottom of what had obviously been a practice churn bomb that had been exploded in a remote part of County Armagh.

Again, perhaps for the amusement of the House, I will regale hon. Members with a tale about me and three other young people who were travelling from Armagh city to Omagh in County Tyrone on our way to a party. We were pulled up and stopped by a vehicle checkpoint, and an armed patrol of the UDR asked us to get out of the car. When I did, there were astonished looks for a start, and then they questioned me very closely about what on earth I thought I was. The trouble was that we were on our way to a fancy dress party in Omagh, and I was dressed—believe it or not—in tights and a large hessian sack as a haggis. That may or may not be in the annals of the deeds of the UDR.

The point I am making is simply that I knew the six counties of Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles. Today, I know Northern Ireland just as well, because my wife and I go there very frequently. What I see today is so different. I see the centre of Armagh city booming. I see Enniskillen—I am quite struck by this—in Fermanagh as a community that is really thriving. I can see all the shops doing well. I wish to goodness that some of our town centres in Scotland were doing as well as that, but that is for another debate on another day.

Of course, I give the armed forces absolute credit for what they did. It was a proud record. The point has been made about not forgetting the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and all those whose lives were endangered during that time. My concluding point is that we have peace today, so in addition to the armed forces, we should recognise the contribution and the courage of those on both sides of the divide who brought about that peace process. Lastly, I was married two miles from the border with the Republic—I know all about hard and soft borders.

6.47 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to do the winding-up speech in this debate. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) on setting the scene so well and on reminding us of the 300,000 people who have served in uniform since 1969. He also reminded us—we need reminding sometimes—that those people from Northern Ireland have served in Iraq, Afghanistan and across the world, so it is not just in Northern Ireland. He also mentioned post-traumatic stress disorder and the fact that the very high levels are much due to the 30 years of the troubles. He spoke about the need for veterans' mental health and psychological problems to be addressed. The Royal Irish Regiment aftercare service also needs to be extended. He referred to the opportunities—equal opportunities and better opportunities—in housing, for victims and in education, health and employment, and he asked the Minister about the Government's report and the appointment of a champion for Northern Ireland. We look forward to his answer.

The Minister for the Armed Forces, the right hon. and gallant Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), is still a reservist and is still serving in uniform. He is still fit enough to do so—I am afraid

I am not, by the way—and it is good to know that he is totally committed to the armed forces. I gently remind him of my question from November 2016, when I referred to the armed forces covenant. He replied that 93% of the covenant was in place in Northern Ireland, but we need to see 100%. He also referred to the LIBOR funding and the good projects that come from that.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith)—I am pleased that he is in his place—referred to the armed forces covenant and the support that he said he was giving for the military covenant. I remind him—I say this very gently and kindly to him—that we are not terribly happy about the comments that he made in our debate. I remind him that the former shadow Secretary of State certainly understood the issues relating to our commitment to the armed forces in Northern Ireland and the need for a full commitment. The next time he meets Sinn Féin, perhaps he will report back to the House and tell us exactly their thoughts on the need to have the armed forces covenant in place and fully part of what we are about. If he has time, he might also like to come and hear our point of view—I am not aware he has met the DUP parliamentary team in Westminster—and the quicker the better.

**Owen Smith:** I have, of course, met DUP Members, and I would be happy to do so again on any occasion the hon. Gentleman chooses. On the implementation issue, the reality is that the armed forces covenant does apply in Northern Ireland. As I said, there are some issues with implementation, but the semantic point that I think his colleagues were trying to make was that it was not fully endorsed by the Executive, for obvious reasons.

**Jim Shannon:** It is not about endorsement; it is about adoption and putting it 100% in place. That is what we want. I say gently to the hon. Gentleman that perhaps someday he will appreciate and understand what we are about.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** I respect the shadow Secretary of State and look forward to meeting him to discuss this issue, but there is nothing semantic about a veteran in my constituency who cannot travel for vital treatment because the Department in Northern Ireland will not fund his travel. That is not a semantic point; it is reality.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. Again, perhaps the shadow Secretary of State will grasp the cold reality at some stage.

The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) referred to the service of everyone in Northern Ireland, whether in an Army uniform, in a police uniform or in the prison service, and we thank him for that—I showed him a text earlier from one of my constituents commending him for doing so. The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) found it took an Ulsterman to win her heart. We are pleased that that happened.

**Carol Monaghan:** May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that he was a rich Ulsterman?

**Jim Shannon:** He was rich the day he married the hon. Lady. That is what riches are—not money—but that is by the by. We thank her for her comments.

[*Jim Shannon*]

She clearly outlined local councils' reluctance in Northern Ireland to fully commit to and implement the military covenant. We are very aware of that, and she has quickly become aware of it as well. She referred to the transition of policing initiative and the principle that there be no disadvantage to service personnel.

The hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) mentioned that councils in Scotland had brought in the military covenant—so the job's done—and asked why the Northern Ireland councils could not support each other, as should be the case across all parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) referred to the scars. Sometimes we need to think for a minute sometimes about the scars, the pain and the hurt there has been. He expressed that extremely well in reminding us of the nation's moral obligation towards those who sacrificed so much for all in the community. He also mentioned how Sinn Féin had disregarded this Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Paul Girvan) mentioned how proud he was to stand up for veterans and how his own family had been part of that. He also reminded us of the commitment in the US of A to veterans and of those who have lost limbs and sustained life-changing injuries. We have been reminded today of what that means.

My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) mentioned how many of her family members had committed themselves in uniform to liberty and freedom and how incredibly proud she was of the armed forces. She also told us that one third of people in Northern Ireland had either served or had family members who had served. It is good to remember that sometimes. The Army units in her constituency remind us not only of the commitment of the reservists, but of that of the NHS whose personnel are allowed to serve in the reserve forces. We should never forget that.

The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) had the good fortune to marry a girl from County Armagh.

**Jamie Stone:** This particular girl was not rich.

**Jim Shannon:** She was rich on the day she married the hon. Gentleman. That is the important thing.

I am very conscious of the timescale, Mr Speaker, and I am trying hard to stick to it. I must declare an interest, having served in the Ulster Defence Regiment for three years and in the Territorial Army for eleven and a half. I enjoyed every minute of my time as a part-time soldier.

My party has raised this issue before in the House, and it is of such grave importance to us that we will continue to raise it here until the contribution of our service personnel is recognised and respected in Northern Ireland in the same way as it is in the rest of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We in Northern Ireland should have the same arrangement as Wales, Scotland and England. No matter what has been said in Europe, we are an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. My

vote in this place is equal to that of every other Member, whether that Member is from Glasgow, Cardiff or London.

We are all equal here. We are all entitled to the same remuneration for our jobs. We are all entitled to the same support, including the support that is available to our families and our dependants. That is a given. Can you imagine the furore, Mr Speaker—I know it would annoy all of us here—if IT support, Library support and all the other support in the House were offered only to mainland MPs? Would we be mad? Of course we would. Can you imagine what would happen if we told the people of Brighton that the percentage of their housing benefit was different from the percentage paid in Bristol? There would be riots on the streets. We know all about riots in Northern Ireland, but I am sure that people in Bristol or Brighton would go mad.

Please will someone tell me why anyone thinks that it can be OK for there to be an armed forces covenant on the UK mainland and not in Northern Ireland? There is something seriously wrong with that. Is the sacrifice made by those in Northern Ireland not the same? Are their lives not worth as much? Are their families not deserving of support and care? Does the postcode lottery extend to serving soldiers and veterans from Northern Ireland? There is not one person here who could or should believe that, yet this is where we stand—still, after too many years of discussing the issue.

We are coming away from Europe, and it is hard. It is a slog, because we have the audacity to say that we wish to regain our sovereignty and make decisions for our people, as we are elected to do, instead of being financially taken advantage of by Europe and given little in return. Even in this, however, we do not have our own sovereignty. We are being held to ransom by members of a minority party who do not give the House the respect that it deserves by sitting in the Chamber. They do not take part in our debates, they do not take part in Committees, and they do not ask any questions. They do not take any role in this House. In return, instead of saying, "If you refuse to speak here, you cannot be heard", we are being held to ransom, and they can do what they want.

I want to put on record my thanks to charities such as Beyond the Battlefield and the Royal British Legion. I think that if the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Pontypridd, visits my constituency, as other Members have, he will find that members of the Royal British Legion there are most perturbed about the armed forces covenant. I am sure that some day he will have an opportunity to talk to them face to face, and to listen to their point of view. Then there is SSAFA, in aid of which I organise a coffee morning every year. We have raised about £25,000 over the years for which I have been a Member of Parliament. A number of other charities are doing great work as well.

Education, health and roads in Northern Ireland are suffering because of the inability of Sinn Féin to maintain the political process in Northern Ireland. My constituency has a long and proud service history, with serving soldiers and veterans alike coming from Strangford. They are being disrespected and disregarded because of an abstentionist party. The members of that party cry for justice, but it is clear that their thirst is for vengeance against anyone who has worn a uniform or is perceived to be the enemy. They cry for openness and transparency while attempting to have convictions overturned, and

include the courts in their attempted rewriting of factual history. They cry and they cry and they cry, but I believe that in Northern Ireland we must move forward.

We are in this Chamber. We are working for the people. We are using our voices for the people of Strangford and the people in Northern Ireland as a whole. I ask the Secretary of State to hear the people of Northern Ireland, to implement the covenant, and to do it with immediate effect. I ask him to take control of Northern Ireland, and to consider our sincere request for our people to be heard. I ask him not to sit still, but to make decisions for all of us.

I hope I am within the time limit that you wanted, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you. It is the time limit that I got. We are most grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

6.59 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** Talking of time limits, Mr Speaker, it is 6.59 pm now, and I am delighted to have until 8.4 pm to conclude this debate. I pay tribute to all who have spoken, and specifically to the DUP for calling this important motion and focusing on something that is important both to me personally and the Government. I declare an interest, in that I have served as a regular in Her Majesty's armed forces—indeed, in Northern Ireland as well—and I serve as a reservist as a lieutenant colonel now.

The covenant is about our commitment, indeed our obligation, as a grateful nation to those who have served for the sacrifices they have made. We as a nation, a Government and a Parliament put them in a place of danger; we ask them to do things that arguably others in society do not do. Therefore, there is not only gratitude, but a determination to show our thanks by making sure that we look after them when they decide for that final time to slide the uniform back across to the quartermaster and move into civilian street.

It is important to say that the absolute majority serve well, transition well and adapt back into civilian society well; I make that point because this is a sensitive issue and people could get the impression from some of the debates we have had, were they to serve, they would perhaps come out damaged or frail, and that is not the case. I hope the whole House agrees that those who have served and are serving are better for it, and the nation is better for their service and what they can contribute once they have completed their service. Having said that, some, through no fault of their own, experience difficulties, and that is where the covenant comes in: to make sure we can provide that help, whether on employment, housing or debt. These are the aspects of the covenant that we need to make sure work in every part of the UK.

The covenant is not just about the obligations of the MOD. That is why the veterans board was created to bring together those who have responsibility in other areas of Government across Whitehall, and to make sure they are held to account, so that when problems arise from the issues raised today, we know where to turn—to the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education or the devolved Administrations—to say, “What are you doing to improve what’s going on?”

I made a very interesting Remembrance Sunday visit to Belfast, and I thank all involved in that for helping me to better understand what is actually happening there, and to meet the various characters in 38 Brigade and hear what is happening today, which is very different from when I served myself. We also spent some time focusing on the practical application of the covenant, and we must recognise that its application is different in Northern Ireland, where it is a sensitive issue due to the unique political circumstances there.

However, much has changed since the last time we debated this subject four years ago. The Northern Ireland veterans support office is now established, up and running and working with the charitable sector, Cobseo and the public sector. We also have a veterans champion in each of the 11 authorities—again, working well—and we have seen significant funding in various aspects of support for the veterans community: for example, around half a million pounds to Combat Stress, which is specifically focused on its work in Northern Ireland, and £600,000 to Belfast Somme Nursing Home as well.

The covenant is also about employment; it is about making sure that there is that transition, a point made by Members across the Chamber today. We have the Defence Relationship Management organisation, which takes those who have chosen to put their hand up and say, “I am departing the armed forces,” through a journey, which begins up to a year and sometimes two years before the end of their service through to two years beyond their service, to make sure they are on their feet.

Again, I stress the case that about 90% of those who leave the armed forces—about 15,000 a year—are back in education or in employment within six months of leaving. But we must all recognise that the help is not always needed straight after they have left, but is sometimes needed many years after. The point that has been made again and again is that if someone is suffering from PTSD or another mental health issue, it can incubate and be there for a number of years, and sometimes the umbilical cord of support from the armed forces is stretched or almost broken. We have seen cases across the country of people coming forward to ask for help from medical services without even declaring that they are a veteran, despite that being something that a GP may need to be aware of. It is very important that we address that better, and we recognise the difficult circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Employment is critical for recognising the value of somebody who has served in the armed forces, with their leadership, commitment, teamwork, grit, tenacity and determination. Who would not want to employ somebody who has worked in the armed forces and has so much to offer? That is why I am pleased that the armed forces covenant is being signed by many big businesses, including in Northern Ireland, such as Caterpillar, Asda and Royal Mail. We are also working with 700 smaller businesses to ensure that there is engagement and a track for people when they leave the armed forces to see where their skills can be transferred.

In conclusion, the covenant is a journey. We created it, we signed it and we have made the commitment, but there is much more work to do, not just in Northern Ireland but across the country. Because of my service and the passion that the Minister for the Armed Forces and I have, we want to make this work. We have to make

[Mr Tobias Ellwood]

it work. I thank the Democratic Unionist party for bringing this debate to the House today. The duty of debt that we owe is shared across the House, and this is the beginning of a journey. If I can make a promise to the DUP, I would be more than delighted to visit Northern Ireland again in the very near future to look in detail at some of the points made by DUP Members today, so that we can move things another notch further.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House recognises the valuable contribution made by men and women from Northern Ireland to our armed forces, including some of the best recruited Reserve Units in the UK and reaffirms its commitment to ensure that the Armed Forces Covenant is fully implemented in Northern Ireland.

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Mr Speaker:** With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 3 to 5 together.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### PENSIONS

That the draft Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.

That the draft National Employment Savings Trust (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.

#### CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Electronic Commerce Directive (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

*Ordered,*

That the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2018 (S.I., 2018, No.10) be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

## HMRC Staff: Dudley

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

7.8 pm

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise in the House the threat to 250 jobs of hard-working and highly skilled civil servants employed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs at the Waterfront offices in Dudley. I am also grateful for the brilliant work done by the local representative of the Public and Commercial Services Union, Tim Crumpton, and to constituents of mine who work at the centre for speaking to me about this matter. I congratulate them on their campaign to save the jobs and to keep the staff working in our community.

These are jobs that neither the staff themselves nor the wider community in Dudley can afford to lose, and that is why I am asking Ministers to look again at this decision. We want them to keep the Brierley Hill offices open and ensure that the highly skilled HMRC staff continue to work for the Government, serving the public. As Members will know, HMRC announced a radical office closure programme in November 2015, reducing the number of offices to just 13, spread across the UK.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He mentions the highly skilled employees. With the introduction of universal credit and the additional work of reviewing every former disability living allowance and current personal independence payment claim, does he agree that to dismiss highly trained staff, who are capable of working between Departments and easing the load, is folly and must be reconsidered?

**Ian Austin:** I completely agree. It is not party political knockabout to say that the introduction of universal credit is clearly not going according to plan. It has obviously hit some wrinkles along the road—that is a charitable way of putting it—and it is an odd decision to get rid of staff when we do not know how difficult it is going to be to properly introduce the new benefit.

The new regional centre for the west midlands will be in Birmingham. That led to the closure of the Walsall office in 2016, while the Worcester office is due to close next year and the Wolverhampton, Coventry and Solihull offices are due to close in 2020 or 2021.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I held a public meeting in Coventry at the end of January. There is a lot of concern because 300 jobs will go from the local tax office and people will either have to travel to Birmingham, or use a phone line, which is not always adequate for their needs. Does my hon. Friend agree that a halt should be called to this?

**Ian Austin:** My hon. Friend is completely right. Everybody knows how hard he fights for jobs in Coventry and that it cannot afford to lose those jobs, just like the Black country cannot afford to lose the ones in Dudley. The city council passed a motion unanimously, probably in no small part due to his campaigning.

It was announced that the Dudley office at the Waterfront and Merry Hill would be taken on by the Department for Work and Pensions, and that staff would transfer to

that Department; a small number of staff would have transferred to the Birmingham office. Staff at that office employed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to work on tax credits were told in 2015 that they would be transferred to the DWP to work on the introduction and implementation of universal credit. As recently as last October, they were told that they would remain at the Waterfront offices to work on the new benefit. Instead, at the end of January it was announced that the Government had changed their mind, that their jobs were at risk and that the office would close. That came as a huge shock to the hard-working, highly skilled and loyal staff. On the same day, DWP announced up to 150 job vacancies at the Waterfront site. Inquiries have been made and they are fixed-term appointments, although local discussions have revealed that they could become permanent. The announcement had little detail and more was promised, we were told, in April 2018.

It was originally envisaged that the Birmingham regional centre would have a capacity of about 3,200 full-time equivalent staff, but when the site of the Birmingham office was announced in October, that figure was reduced to 2,600. No official reason has been given for that, but sources are very clear that it is based on the high costs of premises in Birmingham. The figure of 2,600 did not include the Merry Hill staff, because they were due to go to DWP.

We have discussed the situation in Coventry, where hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), have been campaigning. The same is true in Wolverhampton, where MPs also want their HMRC office to stay open. It has 300 staff and the local council also supports the campaign. Discussions have opened with Andy Street, the West Midlands Mayor, based on the combined authority agreement, which was signed by the then Chancellor with all of the West Midlands combined authority councils, and which uniquely states that there should be a regional Government hub in Birmingham and sub-regional hubs elsewhere in the region.

**Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on the closure of the offices in my constituency, which will affect many of his constituents. Does he agree that the success of the surge and rapid response team at the Waterfront demonstrates exactly the kind of modern capabilities that would add so much to delivering universal credit, and that the redeployment should be reconsidered, whether with DWP or with other bodies, to make use of the existing staff and skills at the Waterfront?

**Ian Austin:** The hon. Gentleman is completely right. I will make that point later. These are highly skilled, highly trained staff, who are very experienced in dealing with complex benefits. No better group of people could be employed for the introduction of universal credit. That is the case we are making to Ministers tonight and I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman is here to do so, too. I very much hope that Ministers will listen to and consider the argument over the next few weeks.

That is a really important point, because for staff in Merry Hill the closure will present grave difficulties. A high proportion of them have caring responsibilities which would make the journey to Birmingham impossible; I have spoken to mothers in exactly that position.

A number of the staff came from offices that closed in the 1990s, and the journeys would make such a move impossible or impractical for them. The recent closure of the office in Walsall left more than half the staff without jobs, and the closure in Worcester is affecting nine out of 10 staff, who now face voluntary or compulsory redundancy; the majority of those staff have caring responsibilities.

HMRC insists that 90% of staff will have a job in the centres, despite the fact that all the closures so far have resulted in much higher job losses. The loss of these skilled and hard-working staff is very risky and it contradicts recommendations made by Committees of this House, which have called for a halt to the office closure process. Staff in Merry Hill believe that the DWP explanation that it has sufficient staff for universal credit to work properly flies in the face of all the current information we have about this complex new benefit's introduction, as we heard a moment ago. Staff who work there are highly skilled: they have dealt with tax credits work since those were introduced, and they are helping with the changeover to UC from tax credits already. They were also stunned that the DWP vacancies were not even considered when the announcement was originally made.

Another point that I know will be of interest to the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) is that the office is in the middle of a recently announced enterprise zone, DY5, and the roles undertaken by HMRC staff completely fit into the Government's vision for this enterprise zone. This brings me to my final point, which is about unemployment in Dudley.

**Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP):** I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. As the chair of the Public and Commercial Services Union parliamentary group, I wonder whether he could confirm that no economic impact assessment and no equality impact assessment has been carried out prior to these closures in Dudley?

**Ian Austin:** As far as I am aware, neither of those assessments has been carried out. That is another point the Minister should be considering this evening.

Unemployment in Dudley is already higher than the national average, and we cannot afford to lose another 250 jobs from the borough. It is important that civil service jobs are spread throughout the country, benefiting communities such as mine, instead of being centralised in London or major regional centres. The UK is already one of the most centralised countries in the world. As a result, investment and growth have been concentrated in the capital and stifled elsewhere. Extraordinarily, despite all the cuts, the proportion of the country's civil servants located in London actually increased every year between 2010 and 2015. Even with deep cuts elsewhere in the country, there were 5,000 more civil servants in the capital in 2015 than there had been in 2013. Instead of closing offices in Black country communities such as the borough I represent, the Government should be moving civil servants and staff from non-departmental public bodies and quangos out of London, transferring jobs from the capital to the rest of the country, spreading wealth more fairly across the UK and contributing to the regeneration of communities in places such as Dudley. That would

[*Ian Austin*]

improve policy making by getting central, regional and local government working more effectively together, bringing government closer to the people and ensuring that policy makers were better informed about what life is like in places that are often ignored by civil servants and politicians based in London. It would also save the Government money by getting staff out of expensive London property.

As I understand it, HMRC has announced that it will be moving 1,500 jobs out of London, so in the spirit of generosity for which we in the Black country are well known, may I tell the Minister that we would be very happy to provide a home for those 1,500 staff? I very much hope that he will consider moving those jobs out of London and to Dudley and the Black country.

Before I finish, I would like to ask some other specific questions. Staff in the office were told late last year that they would transfer to the DWP on 31 March 2022. Can the Minister confirm that it is still the plan that staff will remain in Dudley, working on tax credits, until that date? That would give time to see whether the DWP at Merry Hill can make some or all the fixed-term jobs permanent and offer them to staff there, and it would give time for staff to seek other work in the area and to be retrained. In addition, other DWP roles in local jobcentres would become available. That would not preclude staff who want to go to Birmingham from doing so, and it would offer other staff who work in Wolverhampton a stepping stone if their office does close, as many of them live in our area.

Will the Minister visit the offices with me and listen directly to the staff involved, or meet them here in London? Will he explain how this proposal reflects wider Government policy, given that Ministers recently designated the area as an enterprise zone? Finally, will he explain what assistance will be provided to staff who cannot transfer elsewhere or who do not get jobs elsewhere, to help them to obtain alternative employment if the proposed closure goes ahead?

The decision to close the Merry Hill office came as a huge shock to staff. Many of them will not be able to transfer and Dudley cannot afford to lose their jobs. It is my job to stand up for local people, which is why I secured this debate to demand that Ministers think again. These are hard-working and highly skilled public servants. They are very worried about their future and we need to secure their jobs. That is why we are here today, and I very much hope that Ministers will listen.

7.21 pm

**Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on securing this debate on an important subject. I thank the PCS trade union in Lancashire for bringing the situation in respect of HMRC staff in Lancashire to my attention. Since October 2017, approximately 200 staff at the Guild Tower in Preston have transferred to work on universal credit for the DWP, and in April this year, the next set of staff is due to transfer over, but for the past four to six weeks, rumours have been rife that the imminent transfer of staff will be the last, and that after that tranche has moved over the DWP will no longer need any staff for universal credit.

Let me explain the bigger picture. The original plan was for 4,000 HMRC staff throughout the country to be transferred to the DWP to work on universal credit. There are 600 HMRC staff in Preston who were not part of those plans. They were needed at the new regional centres in Manchester or Liverpool. By February this year, the 4,000 staff throughout the country had reduced to 2,000, with staff in Liverpool, Merry Hill—to which my hon. Friend referred—St Helens and Dudley told that they would not be transferring. Of the remaining 2,000 staff, between 1,400 and 1,500 are in Preston at the Unicentre and the Guild Tower, which have a combined 20 floors, with the rest in Dundee. So far, 200 staff have transferred, and rumours are that the 100 who will transfer next month may be the last to go. This would equate to the loss of between 1,700 and 1,800 jobs in Preston.

Under HMRC's "Building our future" plans, all the existing HMRC offices in Preston either will transfer to the DWP or are scheduled to close. Although Preston was among the original 40 sites shortlisted for consideration as a regional centre, under the current plans there will be no HMRC presence there at all after 2022. That could mean thousands of staff facing either the prospect of moving to work at HMRC's designated regional centres in the north-west, in Manchester and Liverpool, which are unlikely to be within reasonable daily travel distances for staff from Preston, or the prospect of mass redundancies.

Will the Minister please look again at the plans? It is unacceptable that between 1,700 and 1,800 jobs might disappear from Preston. The scale and size of the new regional centres should be reviewed, because huge numbers of jobs in Preston are clearly at risk because of the plans that are dispensing with many staff who the Government know will not transfer to Manchester or Liverpool because of the distances involved.

7.24 pm

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): I shall keep my comments very brief. As the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) has said, these proposals are particular and differ from many of the wider reorganisation proposals for HMRC. Some very specific plans were put in place—the workforce at HMRC in Merry Hill were consulted and told that staff would be transferred from the tax credits team to the Department for Work and Pensions to work on universal credit delivery. That was thought to be the position two months ago, but suddenly, out of the blue, the proposals changed. It came as a shock to HMRC staff based at the Waterfront and to their representatives—both those in the trade union movement and their elected representatives.

The hon. Gentleman set out some very good reasons why the Government should look again at how we can maintain and retain both the staff and the facilities at the Waterfront. The skills provided there are absolutely first class and would be a credit to any part of the civil service that could make use of them. As I mentioned earlier, the surge and rapid response team that has been operating out of the Waterfront—originally from HMRC and the passport service—has shown the adaptability of the teams that are based there. There is no doubt that the tax credit team could similarly transfer and provide a fantastic service, whether it is in conjunction with DWP, other parts of HMRC or Her Majesty's Treasury.

The Waterfront is a growth area. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the DY5 enterprise zone that many of us worked so hard to secure. On top of that, we have the new tram links connecting to that enterprise zone, which—I almost said coincidentally, but it is almost tragically—is due to open at almost exactly the time when these jobs are scheduled to be taken away from the Waterfront.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to look again at both the content of these proposals and the timetable for them, to see whether the Government are doing absolutely everything they can to find the right way to make full use of the fantastic talent that we have at HMRC at the Waterfront, to give employees the certainty that they need, to retain the skills and experience that we need in the civil service, and to set an awful lot of minds at rest in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Dudley North.

7.28 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):**

I congratulate the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on securing this important debate. I know that these are matters of particular concern to him, as they are to the hon. Member for Preston (Sir Mark Hendrick) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), who have also made contributions this evening. HMRC's location strategy was the subject of a Backbench Business debate held in November last year, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to return to this important matter.

As the hon. Member for Dudley North pointed out, in November 2015 HMRC announced its location strategy as a crucial element of its work to create a modern, world-class tax authority—a key part of our long-term economic plan for national prosperity. Since 2010 we have made substantial investments, enabling HMRC to do more to tackle evasion, drive down avoidance and improve compliance.

HMRC is transforming into a leaner, more highly skilled operation, offering modern digital services. It is moving away from outdated systems of manual processing to become more flexible and technologically driven—changing the way it works and using today's technology and IT to improve the services it delivers for its customers. These investments in technology mean that HMRC can tackle fraud, evasion and avoidance more effectively and that customer services have improved, with far lower wait times on helplines and new ways to get support, such as webchats.

Changes to HMRC's office estate are an important part of this transformation process, moving it from a large, widely dispersed estate of offices across the UK, varying in size, to a considered network of significant, modern regional hubs. In November 2015, HMRC announced that over the following 10 years it would bring its employees together in 13 regional offices, all in locations where it already has a significant presence, as it does in Birmingham. The co-location of teams across HMRC will lead to increased collaboration and flexibility, allowing it to provide more effective and efficient services to the taxpayer, and it has put support in place to help its workforce through the changes.

In Birmingham, the regional centre will be situated in the heart of the city at 3 Arena Central. It will be home to 3,600 civil servants, with 2,650 HMRC staff moving

in from 13 offices around the west midlands region to undertake a wide range of key tax professional and operational delivery roles.

The first of HMRC's regional centres opened in Croydon in July 2017 and construction is under way at the Birmingham site, along with further sites in Bristol, Cardiff, Belfast and Leeds. All those offices will be modern, environmentally friendly and located in the heart of the community. Most of them will be shared with other Government Departments, and all have been sized for the future needs of HMRC and the taxpayer.

In addition to the 13 regional centres, HMRC will keep seven transitional sites open across the UK for several years, where it will help retain key skills during the transition period, as well as five specialist sites for work that cannot be done elsewhere. For example, HMRC will retain Telford as a site for some of its specialist digital teams. By phasing the moves into its regional centres over a number of years and keeping sites open during the transition, HMRC will ensure that disruption to its business operations is minimised. The Birmingham regional centre will open in late 2020.

The overall programme to move to regional centres will deliver savings to the taxpayer of around £300 million up to 2025 and then annual cash savings of £74 million in 2025-26, rising to more than £90 million by 2028. It will also avoid costs of £75 million a year from 2021, when the current private finance initiative contract with Mapeley comes to an end.

It is important to stress that this is not just about cost savings and bricks and mortar. HMRC's new office structure will allow people to develop more fulfilling careers. There will be a far wider variety of jobs and different career paths to senior roles, as a wider range of work will be based on single sites. These modern buildings will unquestionably deliver a better working environment and experience for HMRC's workforce. Crucially, their city centre locations will also increase HMRC's attractiveness as an employer, enabling it to recruit and retain the next generation of skilled professionals. That is particularly important given that a substantial proportion of its long-serving workforce are approaching retirement age.

HMRC is clear that it wants to do all it can to keep its people's skills, knowledge and experience, and it has a policy of minimising any redundancies. The vast majority of HMRC employees are within reasonable daily travel of a regional centre, specialist site or transitional site, and that is deliberate: decisions on where to locate the regional centres were based on modelling of where existing staff are based. HMRC estimates that 90% of its workforce will be able to move to one of its regional centres or complete their career in their current office. For those currently based at the Waterfront offices, the travel time from Dudley to Birmingham city centre is between 35 and 55 minutes by car or train.

That said, HMRC recognises that individual employees have distinct personal circumstances, and not everyone will feel able to move to a regional centre, even where they might be reasonably close by. So it has put structured support in place—this is a point that the hon. Member for Dudley North asked about—to help those who can move and those who cannot. One year ahead of any move, everyone affected has the opportunity to discuss their personal circumstances with their manager and talk through any particular needs to be taken into

[Mel Stride]

account when decisions are made or any help they need to make the move—for instance, help with additional travel costs for up to the first five years. It is a tried and tested process, with more than 10,000 such conversations held in HMRC over the last two years. There is also a range of support for those unable to make the move to a regional centre. HMRC runs a programme of training, workshops, webinars and coaching, which includes advice on CV writing and identifying transferrable skills. Since starting in the autumn, it has been offered to around 800 employees, and HMRC will continue to provide such support.

Let me turn to some specific questions that the hon. Member for Dudley North posed. An equality assessment was conducted prior to the location's announcement in 2015, with a high-level summary published to staff at that time. HMRC continues to review those, and the issues in the west midlands are of course considered with the active input of representatives from the Brierley Hill office and the local Public and Commercial Services Union.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me an important question about the date to which staff not being transferred on the universal credit/DWP basis might expect to stay in place. Currently, HMRC expects there to be ongoing tax credits work in Brierley Hill until March 2021. At that point, the tax credits caseload is expected to have fully moved across to universal credit, so the tax credits work currently undertaken in Merry Hill will come to

an end. However, HMRC intends gradually to redeploy the skilled and experienced staff there to other work as the tax credits caseload decreases. HMRC will work with those staff to ensure that there is every opportunity to make a successful move into reallocated employment.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I would be happy to meet him and some of the staff with whom he has been liaising. I would be more than happy to do that. Perhaps doing so in Westminster would be most appropriate, as the hon. Member for Preston and my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South might wish to join him for those discussions—I would certainly be open to that.

Finally, the hon. Member for Dudley North asked about the support provided for those who might not, in the event, be able to make the move from Merry Hill to the new centre in the centre of Birmingham. As I have said, all staff will have a one-to-one discussion with their manager around a year in advance of any office move that affects them, to discuss their personal circumstances, establish whether they are within reasonable daily travel of the new office and discuss what support might be needed to enable them to move. For those who can move, there will be financial support towards the additional cost of their journey time for up to five years. HMRC is supporting those who cannot move by seeking redeployment opportunities for them in other Departments.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.38 pm

*House adjourned.*

## Deferred Divisions

### POLITICAL PARTIES, NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Transparency of Donations and Loans etc. (Northern Ireland Political Parties) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 23 November 2017, be approved.

*The House divided: Ayes 308, Noes 261.*

### Division No. 126]

#### AYES

Adams, Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
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  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Brokenshire, rh James  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buckland, Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Burns, Conor  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Cartledge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Rehman  
Chope, Sir Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, Colin  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, Mr Simon  
Cleverly, James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Crouch, Tracey  
Davies, Chris

Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Glyn  
Davies, Mims  
Davies, Philip  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Dodds, rh Nigel  
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
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  
Fysh, Mr Marcus  
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  
Graham, Luke  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Bill  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Greening, rh Justine  
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  
Hart, Simon  
Hayes, rh Mr John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Heaton-Jones, Peter  
Henderson, Gordon  
Herbert, rh Nick  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hollingbery, George  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Howell, John  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
Jack, Mr Alister  
James, Margot  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
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  
Knight, Julian  
Kwarteng, Kwasi  
Lamont, John  
Lancaster, rh Mark  
Leadsom, rh Andrea  
Lee, Dr Phillip  
Lefroy, Jeremy  
Leigh, Sir Edward  
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Brandon  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Lidington, rh Mr David  
Little Pengelly, Emma  
Lopez, Julia  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Maclean, Rachel  
Main, Mrs Anne  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, Kit  
Mann, Scott  
Masterton, Paul  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
McVey, rh Ms Esther  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalf, 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  
Paisley, Ian  
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  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Prisk, Mr Mark  
Pritchard, Mark  
Purgglove, Tom  
Quin, Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Raab, Dominic  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Robinson, Gavin  
Robinson, Mary  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Rudd, rh Amber  
Rutley, David  
Sandbach, Antoinette  
Seely, Mr Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Sharma, Alok  
Shelbrooke, Alec  
Simpson, David  
Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
Skidmore, Chris  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Royston  
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
Spencer, Mark  
Stephenson, Andrew  
Stevenson, John

Stewart, Bob  
 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  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom

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

Gray, Neil  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lillian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Grogan, John  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Killen, Ged  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Lee, Karen  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor

McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onasanya, Fiona  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Tami, Mark

### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
 Alexander, Heidi  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Amesbury, Mike  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Ashworth, Jonathan  
 Austin, Ian  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Bardell, Hannah  
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Berger, Luciana  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, rh Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
 Brabin, Tracy  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brake, rh Tom  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Brown, Alan  
 Brown, Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cable, rh Sir Vince  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Carden, Dan  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Chapman, Jenny  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Coaker, Vernon  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy

Coyle, Neil  
 Crausby, Sir David  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Dakin, Nic  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Day, Martyn  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dent Coad, Emma  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Drew, Dr David  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Frith, James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gaffney, Hugh  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter

Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Turley, Anna  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom

West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Woodcock, John  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

Freer, Mike  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 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  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 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  
 Hart, Simon  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Jack, Mr Alister  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 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  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Little Pngelly, Emma  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Masterton, Paul  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 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  
 Moran, Layla  
 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  
 Paisley, Ian  
 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  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

#### PASSPORTS

That the draft Passport (Fees) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.

*The House divided: Ayes 317, Noes 258.*

#### Division No. 127]

#### AYES

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  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Brake, rh Tom  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, 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  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 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

Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Seely, Mr Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 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  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

De Piero, Gloria  
 Debonnaire, Thangam  
 Dent Coad, Emma  
 Dhese, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Drew, Dr David  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Frith, James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gaffney, Hugh  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Grogan, John  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Killen, Ged

Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Lee, Karen  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onasanya, Fiona  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan

### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
 Alexander, Heidi  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Amesbury, Mike  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Ashworth, Jonathan  
 Austin, Ian  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Bardell, Hannah  
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Berger, Luciana  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, rh Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
 Brabin, Tracy  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Brown, Alan  
 Brown, Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cable, rh Sir Vince

Cadbury, Ruth  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Carden, Dan  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Chapman, Jenny  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Coaker, Vernon  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crausby, Sir David  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Dakin, Nic  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Day, Martyn  
 De Cordova, Marsha

Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy

Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul

Tami, Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Turley, Anna  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma

Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Woodcock, John  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

*Question accordingly agreed to.*



# Westminster Hall

Wednesday 7 March 2018

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

## Misogyny as a Hate Crime

9.30 am

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered misogyny as a hate crime.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, in a debate on an issue that has been hotly discussed over the past couple of days. This debate is particularly timely, given that tomorrow is International Women's Day. I pay tribute to the excellent work undertaken by the all-party parliamentary group on domestic violence and the Women and Equalities Committee, which have taken on important and often contentious issues to enhance the lives of all women up and down the country. Often, they have been supported by charities and think tanks such as the Fawcett Society, Women's Aid and End Violence Against Women, which have contributed broader thoughts on policy relating to women. I thank them all for their work in this field.

All forms of abuse are committed disproportionately against women and girls, and the perpetrators are usually men. Violence against women and girls is part of what is stopping women achieving equality. Some 22% of girls aged seven to 12 have experienced jokes of a sexual nature from boys, and nearly three quarters of all 16 to 18-year-old boys and girls say they hear sexual name-calling, including terms such as "slut" and "slag" used towards girls at school, daily or a few times a week. In 2016, there were 2 million female victims of domestic violence. About 85,000 women a year are raped, but only half those cases are reported. The Government recognise that more needs to be done to tackle violence towards women and girls, and it is welcome that they are consulting in advance of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill. I hope this debate will be considered carefully as part of that consultation.

The debate is about securing an extension to the existing hate crime definitions and sentencing better to prevent violence against women, support early intervention against lower-level incidents and give women greater confidence in reporting the actions that, too often, have become the wallpaper of their lives. That is most certainly the case: 85% of women aged between 18 and 24 report that they have been on the receiving end of unwanted attention.

The APPG on domestic violence found that there is a clear link between low-level incidents of harassment towards women and more serious forms of violence and sexual crime. That is why I want the Government formally to extend the five strands of centrally monitored hate crime to include misogyny and provide for appropriate reflective sentencing. That would mean that incidents of street harassment, online abuse or other negative acts or behaviour directed towards a woman simply because she was a woman could be formally logged and monitored.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I apologise to the hon. Lady and to you, Sir David, for not being able to stay to the end of the debate. I have to meet some constituents who are visiting, but I would have liked to contribute. The hon. Lady is talking about misogyny. Can we take it as read that she thinks that misandry ought to be a hate crime, too? If she does not, will she explain why she thinks there should be one rule for one and another rule for the other?

**Melanie Onn**: I am terribly sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not going to stay for the entirety of the debate. He regularly contributes to debates on this topic, but rarely stays around for the responses. If he wants to raise the issue of misandry, he is perfectly able to do so. To date, he has not. He has every opportunity, as everybody in the House does, to pursue that. It does not form part of my suggestions today, which are focused on misogyny. There is a power imbalance in society that disproportionately affects women negatively, so I think misogyny should be an exclusive strand of hate crime.

By setting the definition in statute, the Government would put down a marker to say that culturally endemic negative attitudes towards women are not acceptable. The recording of the crime would give a clearer picture of the scale of the issue, assist the police in taking action and intervening, and give women greater confidence that their concerns would be taken seriously. In evidence to the APPG on domestic violence, Women's Aid said:

"Hate crime law was designed to combat crimes that deny equal respect and dignity to people who are seen as other... That violence is a consequence of sex inequality... That inequality undermines the ability of targeted people to feel safe and secure in society."

The increasing rates of violence, sexual violence, harassment and disproportionate online abuse towards women show that women are routinely seen as "other". If we are genuinely to tackle the violence, we must address the root cause—inequality. That certainly seems to be what Baroness Williams of Trafford was hinting at when she said:

"The Government recognise that it is critical to look beyond criminal justice measures and also to focus on what we can do to prevent abuse and violence in the first place."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 November 2017; Vol. 787, c. 481.]

That is the challenge that five police forces around the country—most notably Nottinghamshire police—have set out to address. Their experience of piloting misogyny as a recordable hate crime has led to an increase in reporting.

**Gloria De Piero** (Ashfield) (Lab): I have been reading the press reports about this debate with some interest. In Nottinghamshire in 2014, Paddy Tipping presided over the first force to introduce such a crime. As a Nottinghamshire MP, I want to reassure hon. Members that in Nottinghamshire the world has not caved in—far from it. When misogyny and hate crime were included in the force victim satisfaction survey, 94% of victims said they felt reassured and confident in the police. In short, this has been a success.

**Melanie Onn**: It is welcome to hear that it has been a success. The police more widely do not seem to object to the extension of the definition of hate crime. The police are looking to the Government to support them

[Melanie Onn]

in that action and to ensure that appropriate sentencing facilities are available to support any action they might take.

Contrary to media hype, there was not a surge of reports complaining of wolf-whistling, but arrests have been made for public order offences and actual bodily harm incidents that were classed as misogynist. That certainly reflects the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), who claims that the initiative has been a success. There are specially trained officers in place in a city that has two universities, and the change has made positive difference to women, who feel better able to report unwanted attention and receive appropriate support where necessary.

Ultimately, I hope that if we set our laws appropriately, there will be a reduced need for police intervention, because behaviour and culture will evolve to fit the new standard. Dame Lara Cox, who chaired the Fawcett Society sex discrimination law review, said:

“Laws are instruments in changing attitudes, setting the bar for expectations of treatment and behaviour”.

She made the point that our laws are not stagnant and that they must reflect the reality of today's society.

The reality, as borne out by campaigns such as #EverydaySexism, #goodnightout, #girlsagainst and, more recently, #MeToo, as well as, internationally, #StopStreetHarassment, is that today's society is awash with misogynistic acts such as groping, sexual comments, upskirting, revenge porn, sexual remarks, leering and stalking. As the nature of harassment changes, so must the laws that govern it, and too many incidents do not meet the criteria for assault, discrimination or public order offences.

The fact that I have had the temerity to call for this debate—this exploration of ideas—has provoked a backlash of vile fury. I have been told that I am in some way a man-hater, that I have no sense of humour and that I should most certainly learn to take a compliment. Because I am not a snowflake, as has been suggested, that has not dissuaded me from continuing to discuss these ideas, but it highlights why women and girls are so often put off from directly challenging behaviour at the time the incidents occur. They are put off from even reporting them, given that the potential response is so aggressive.

**Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op):** I am pleased that my hon. Friend has introduced the debate, not least because I am a strong defender of the reputation of men. Sexual harassment is not a given—people can choose not to do it—so it is really important in debates that we do not disrespect men by somehow suggesting that they are incapable of controlling their behaviour. I am pleased that she is setting out a way in which we can differentiate between the men who understand the 21st century and those who do not.

**Melanie Onn:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point that is hard to disagree with. Some responses that I have received over the last few days have not shown men in their best light, which is incredibly unfortunate, because all the men in my life accept that any actions or behaviours that put women in an uncomfortable position

or make them feel unsafe or not secure in their environment are not acceptable. The defence of some of that behaviour has been quite surprising.

**Philip Davies:** Will the hon. Lady give way again, just briefly?

**Melanie Onn:** I feel compelled to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

**Philip Davies:** I apologise for interrupting the hon. Lady's flow, but she just said something that made me think of something I had not expected to come to. Does she therefore think what her colleague, the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), said about my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) should be a crime?

**Melanie Onn:** Unless the hon. Gentleman is more specific, I cannot respond to that.

**Philip Davies:** At a political rally, the right hon. Gentleman repeated someone's remark that my right hon. Friend should be lynched. Clearly, that made my right hon. Friend and other people feel very uncomfortable. Given what the hon. Lady is saying, does she think that should be a crime?

**Melanie Onn:** If the individual to whom the comments were directed felt that they wished to report that, it would fall within the scope of today's discussion. Those sorts of comment are unnecessarily aggressive and there is no place for them, certainly not in the nature of political debate and discourse, but that has been explored extensively and more directly with the individuals concerned, who explained themselves as they wished to.

In the last few days, I have been told stories that have made me so sad, because after decades of talking about equality, we seem so far away from it when it comes to girls and women being targeted because of their gender. Twelve and 13 year-old girls in their school uniform can still be leered at and suggestive comments and actions made towards them. These are children, yet some people still consider that an appropriate course of action. Women in their 20s walking past pubs are routinely heckled and their appearance is audibly commented on. None of those so obviously charming men take the step of directly addressing the women. Why would they not want to talk to them? Because that would humanise the objects passing by who they seek to objectify in such an unfriendly and intimidating way?

If the statistics are anything to go by, nearly every woman will have a story of deliberately being made to feel uncomfortable or intimidated, or of being touched or the object of someone's unwanted attentions, at the very least, and 90% of women in the UK experience street harassment before they are 17. Because of that, 71% of women have done something to guard themselves against the threat of harassment, such as changing their route to work or avoiding parks. It is dreadful that women have to mould their lives around avoiding threatening situations. If street harassment, abuse and continued sex discrimination have no place in our society, let us have laws that fully and properly reflect that. Let us set a bar for expected behaviour and proactively take steps to reduce violence and sexual crime against women.

9.44 am

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to be able to contribute to the debate, Sir David, and I apologise for having been a little late, due to the vagaries of the Victoria line. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) made a powerful speech and has campaigned powerfully on this issue.

Women in Walthamstow feel very strongly about the gauntlet that they too often have to run when they walk down some of our main streets where there are busy cafés and pubs, especially when the weather gets a little warmer. For many, it is a nightmare. As the first female MP for Walthamstow, I have received a deluge of emails from residents who say that they cannot walk down their streets and feel safe during the day time, let alone at night. We have campaigned about this problem for many years—I pay tribute to the Take Back the Streets group in Walthamstow. Literally, women cannot go about their business. This debate is fundamentally about freedom—the freedom for women to be able to use the spaces and places in our society just as equally as men do.

It is a sad fact that Hoe Street in Walthamstow is a gauntlet for women to walk down, especially on a warm and sunny day, and that in workplaces women do not always feel safe. As a society, that holds us all back. Half of women say that they have been sexually harassed at work; one in five regularly experiences sexual harassment on our streets. There is a day-to-day phobia of passing a group of men, although sometimes it is unfounded—I am sure that the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) wants me to point that out. But all too often, women know that as they walk past, they may be subject to touching; somebody may follow them; and somebody may try to engage them in a conversation, even when they have said no.

The other night, when I left Parliament I was followed down the street by a young man who would not take no for an answer—he kept trying to put his arms around me and touch me. Sadly, that is a day-to-day experience for too many women in our society. The trouble is that women are taught to minimise that behaviour—to brush it off, to somehow find a way of avoiding it, to feel that perhaps they should not be out on the streets late at night or that perhaps they should scream.

Sadly, it is part of our culture that someone feels they have the right to touch and to feel a woman at will. We need to change that. We know that 400,000 women were sexually assaulted in our country last year. That comes from being in a culture not of sex but of power. It is about entitlement. It is about the concept that a woman's body is the primary thing of interest about her and therefore what matters is how men respond to it.

We should be very clear that this is #NotAllMen. What is so powerful about recognising misogyny as a hate crime is identifying that that is not normal human behaviour. It is not about men and women flirting with each other; it is not about men and women being able to banter with each other; it is not about men and women being able to ask each other out. Perhaps they exist in our society, but I have yet to meet a woman who went out with a man who followed her down the street and tried to put his hands on her bottom. It is about being able to say that this sort of behaviour is holding too many back in our society.

Let us look at the figures for sexual harassment of young women in our society: the figure of 50% of women experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace rises to 63% among 18 to 24-year-olds. It is a damning indictment of Britain in 2018 that a young woman cannot start her career without the fear that she might face groping in her workplace, unwanted sexual advances and being told that she cannot seek a promotion if she dares to say no. The #MeToo campaign in particular shows that that is widespread behaviour.

The good news for all of us is that the public are with us. In surveys about sexual harassment, 80% of the public recognise that harassment. No woman should have to fear when she gets on a tube train that the man opposite has a mobile phone with him and what he might try to do with it. Upskirting is a completely unacceptable form of harassment. It is an abuse of the power of a man to define what is important about a woman. No woman should be subject to groping of her breasts in the workplace, but we have seen those reports. Through treating misogyny as a hate crime, we can change the conversation about what is acceptable. That is why I am such a fan of what has been done in Nottinghamshire and why I hope that the Mayor of London follows suit.

We women in Walthamstow know first hand how difficult that is. The honest truth is that when we started recording the spaces and places in our local community where women felt unsafe—where they could not walk past a particular pub or café without feeling attacked or being harassed—the police told us it was a cultural matter. They said we simply could not stop men hanging out together and that that was just what happened. As a big champion and a big respecter of men, I believe that is simply not the case. There is nothing that says that, when men get together, they have to harass women.

Importantly—I really hope the hon. Member for Shipley defends us and supports us in making this argument—making misogyny a hate crime is a way of clearly stating that. It is a way of standing up for men's reputation and men's right to be seen as equal citizens rather than as predators in waiting, by separating out unacceptable behaviour and recognising those men who abuse their power and strength. That is the difficult thing. People might think this debate is about jokes, but a rape joke is never funny, because it is always about the power imbalance. It is always about the possibility that someone might follow through and use their physical strength to pin you down—the possibility, when they follow you down the road, that they might follow you all the way home and force their way into your house. That is a threat that women often live with daily.

By categorising sexual harassment as a hate crime, we would change the conversation so that it was not about what women need to do to avoid it. I am sure many of us have been frustrated when police officers have suggested that women need to change their routes. I was furious when my local police suggested to girls at a local school, because we had had reports of someone flashing, that they needed not to travel home alone—that they needed to moderate their behaviour, rather than us needing to catch the man who was doing that. We must change the conversation and say, "Here are people committing a crime."

We do not let the victim drive what we do about other crimes. We do not say when there is a burglary, "What really matters is that you have better locks on your house rather than that we find the persistent burglar in

[*Stella Creasy*]

this community,” but all too often we do when it comes to sexual harassment. We warn women to be careful rather than finding the peepers and flashers. We warn women about being alone at night rather than saying we will put more police on the streets. We say that we cannot tackle men’s behaviour rather than asking them to change.

We have had a great experience in Walthamstow: when we have gone in to talk to café and pub owners, we have found that they want change, too. They recognise that it is bad for their business to have a reputation for being a hotspot for sexual harassment. They recognise that their patrons’ behaviour might be inappropriate and that that is bad for them. We have tried to use anti-social behaviour legislation to challenge that behaviour and to make those businesses take it seriously, but many of them have risen to the challenge without being asked.

That is one of the important things about this conversation and why, for too long, we have let hate crime against women somehow be seen as hate crime against any other protected characteristic. In having the conversation, we have not spoken up for the best of people or for the best of characteristics: treating one other with respect. Respect is not just about being in a workplace with a colleague without feeling the need to touch their bosom; it is also about a man being able to walk along the street with a woman and feel that she is not frightened of him. Yet the honest truth for many women is that if a man is walking behind us late at night, many of us might stop, look at our phones or cross the street. What a damning indictment it is of men in our country that we are in a position where we feel like that!

Making misogyny a hate crime would help us change the conversation about men as much as it would help us ensure that women are safe. I really hope that the Government listen and work with police forces to get this right. My biggest fear is that the police will say, as they have said to me, “What would we do with all the reports?” as though the problem is the amount of data rather than the fact that these things are happening. Data drives conversations. When I talked to people from Nottinghamshire, they made such a powerful case about how data had driven conversations, not just about street harassment but about the connection between sexual assault and violence against women more generally. That has been a powerful way of changing the conversation.

Sir David, 2018 is the year of #MeToo. Everyone asks whether this will be a watershed in the way women are treated in our society. The honest truth is that we will not be able to answer that question until 2019, but I really hope that the Minister listens to the powerful case my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby made and to the pleas from women in places such as Walthamstow and that he helps to ensure that that happens. Perhaps then, in 2019, we will be able to look both our sons and our daughters in the face and say, “Finally, we are moving towards a better society.”

9.54 am

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): It is an absolute pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), who made a cracking speech. I agree with most of what she said, so I will not go over the same points.

I want to talk a wee bit about my own perspective and experience, so forgive me if my speech appears a little self-indulgent. To me, there are two main strands to this issue: the structural side and the cultural side. Let me deal first with the structural side, which brings me back to my first tutorial at university, when we were asked why women were still unequal. I said that the problem begins with how and when our society created the structures that we still use today. There was a time when we kidded ourselves that everything was as simple as a man marrying a woman, him going to work and her staying at home to look after anything domestic. It was on that foundation that we built and viewed everything as we know it today: the economy, our legal systems, our work environments and our Governments. Everything was owned and created by men, with the false assumption that the nuclear heterosexual family was normal.

Rightly, we slowly began to realise that there is no such thing as normal—that women can be different and yet just as capable as men, and that what they do with their lives should not be assumed for them. We have begun to address some of those barriers, but, fundamentally, we are trying to find ways almost to stuff women into that structure without fully reflecting on the fact that it was created at a very misogynistic time and from a very patriarchal perspective. There has been no recognition that our economy and our work life completely fail to address or even acknowledge the existence of things such as period poverty and crippling painful menstrual cycles, which are more common than most people think. Until we accept and change the fact that everything comes from a patriarchal perspective, we will always struggle.

That brings me to the cultural side of this issue. It feels like we are at a turning point with things such as the “Time’s Up” movement. Frankly, the bravery of the women who have come forward to talk about their experience of abuse, sexism and misogyny, no matter how small it may seem, is incredible. I cannot say it has been positive in terms of moving us forward, but if we have learned anything from all that, it is that these are not small occurrences. The downside to all this progress is being faced with the reality that the women in my life, whom I know and love, have been raped, beaten, assaulted, called sluts and whores, and groped throughout their lives, and they have been led to believe that that is normal and is just a given—that it is just something that happens and, like the hon. Member for Walthamstow said, something that women should somehow deal with or solve themselves.

Misogyny is absolutely everywhere in our society, to the point that we often miss it because it has been so normalised by being continually unchallenged. Some folk will be uncomfortable with the graphic language that I am about to use, but I am not going to dilute the reality of such an important issue. I am used to online abuse in particular. I am regularly called a wee boy, and told that I wear my dad’s suits and stuff. Me and my pals actually laugh about it. That is how I cope with it. We find the best insults, and that is how we have a laugh, but I struggle to see any joke in systematically being called a dyke, a rug muncher, a slut, a whore and a scruffy bint. I have been told, “You can’t put lipstick on a pig,” and:

“Let the dirty bitch eat shit and die”.

I could soften some of this by talking about “the C-word”, but the reality is that there is no softening when I am targeted by these words: I am left reading them on my screen day in, day out. Someone said:

“She needs a kick in the cunt”.

I have been called “guttural cunt”, “ugly cunt” and “wee animal cunt”. There is no softening just how sexualised and misogynistic the abuse is. Some guy called William Hannah—I have never heard of him in my life—commented:

“I’ve pumped some ugly burds in my time but I jist wouldn’t”.

I have been assured multiple times that I do not have to worry because I am so ugly that no one would want to rape me.

All those insults were tailored to me because I am a woman. We can kid ourselves that those are comments by a few bad, anonymous people on Twitter, but they are not: this is everyday language. I am aware that everyone here was uncomfortable hearing those insults—I felt uncomfortable reading them out—yet there are people who feel comfortable flinging those words around every day. When that language goes unchallenged, it becomes normalised, and that creates an environment that allows women to be subjected to a whole spectrum of abuse. I regularly see guys on Facebook talking about “getting pussy” and using other horrible words for women, but should we really expect any better given that the man sitting in the Oval Office thinks that it is okay to grab a woman by the pussy and faces no consequences?

Even in this place we need a bit of self-reflection. We are only starting to appreciate the full extent of the abuse and danger that women face on a daily basis, yet only a few weeks ago in the voting Lobby I was physically pressed up against a Member who has been accused of sexual misconduct, because there is so little room. That is not normal, and it is fair to say we should be looking at and talking about that. I am blessed in that I have the same right and influence as any elected man in this place, but what about all the female staff here who do not? Is that really the best example we can set for society? Surely it is something that we should at least be talking about.

As another personal example, I have been open in saying that I have been very unwell recently and was unable to travel and, therefore, vote. Like most people, I have no desire to disclose to the world the private, intimate and often embarrassing details that regularly come with illness. That is the business of my doctor, my Chief Whip and me—no one else—just as it would be in any other workplace with a line manager.

A fortnight ago, the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), alongside the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), suggested that I turn up for work more often, as I had a poor voting record. I responded to let them know I had been ill. I also pointed out the level of abuse and misinformation they were causing for me, but they stood by their comments. My Chief Whip wrote a letter to theirs, asking for an apology, retraction and correction, but there has been nothing, and still the abuse still comes my way daily. For two men to feel it is appropriate to chastise a female colleague publicly for a medical absence is bad enough, but knowingly to continue to misrepresent and cause abuse is frankly out of order. Judging by the House of Commons code of conduct, it qualifies as bullying, as it would in any other workplace.

Believe it or not, I have never lost sleep over the opinions of either of those hon. Gentlemen, and I have no intention of starting now. However, I am in a position to say something about it. What about the woman out there who has had a hysterectomy and is getting the same rubbish at her work? Or what about the woman with post-natal depression who has extra stress added on by having to put up with this kind of nonsense in her work?

Last year, the Fawcett Society launched a sex discrimination law review. It said:

“The long-term aim is to nudge people towards a culture shift and to reframe misogynist behaviour as socially undesirable.”

Perhaps it is time we assessed the example that we set, because if we cannot get our own House in order, how can we expect anyone out there to?

10.2 am

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): May I say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David? I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) on securing this important debate, and all Members on the powerful words they have used. Unfortunately, I am not uncomfortable with the language used by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black), because I, too, am normalised to hearing such words, as most people are in society.

Like many others who have spoken, I share the view that crimes motivated by prejudice and hostility should always be considered to be hate crimes. In England and Wales, we see hate crime figures increasing year on year, but that is partly due to better recording and an upsurge in victims coming forward. In 2016-17, more than 80,000 incidents were recorded when victims were considered to have been targeted because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity.

What about the crimes committed as a result of hatred or prejudice against someone because of their gender? Surely sexual discrimination, violence against women and sexual objectification are all hate crimes. All too often, society and the legal system continue to trivialise such acts of abuse. There is a need for a long overdue change in the law so that misogynistic acts are treated as the serious hate crimes they actually are.

**Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): Will the hon. Lady join me in looking forward to the publication of Lord Bracadale’s review on hate crime legislation in Scotland, which is considering whether gender should be made a new category in hate crime?

**Carolyn Harris**: I welcome any information coming forward that helps us to hammer the point home.

The recent rise in cases of upskirting is a prime example of how these crimes are being played down. It is vital that such behaviour is seen for what it is. It is not a bit of fun or a harmless prank; it is humiliating for victims and a huge invasion of their privacy. It should be made illegal. *[Interruption.]* I apologise if I am echoing—that was me in stereo.

A recent sex discrimination law review by the Fawcett Society found that violence against women and girls is endemic in the UK, and it concluded that the legal system is failing these women and is in need of fundamental reform.

[Carolyn Harris]

The evidence it gathered is deeply disturbing, highlighting that incidents of violence, abuse and harassment of women are increasing while access to justice for victims remains poor.

The review's recommendations outlined a need to change the law so that women can be confident in reporting crimes against them. Women who have been raped should not be forced to divulge their own sexual history. Laws on sexual harassment in the workplace need to be strengthened to protect women from third parties, customers and service users, as well as from colleagues. Breaches of domestic abuse orders should be classed as criminal offences, and the definition of "revenge porn" needs reviewing and strengthening.

Any incident motivated by—or perceived to be motivated by—prejudice should be considered a hate crime. I welcome the progress we have seen in our legal system in recent years on the detection, reporting and prosecution of hate crimes based on the five current centrally monitored strands of race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender identity. However, that progress also highlights the glaring omission of criminal offences motivated by other characteristics such as age and appearance, and specifically gender-based crime.

On appearance, I personally have become the subject of abuse purely because I am of a larger size and some people probably think I wear garish clothes. I feel comfortable in myself and my appearance, but others seem to take pleasure in homing in on the fact that I am not a size 8. That is their problem, not mine.

Some forces have already started to take action. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), in 2016 Nottinghamshire police extended its definition of hate crime to include misogynistic incidents for a two-month trial period. The success of that trial has not only seen it keep the trial in place but drawn interest from other forces around the country, including North Yorkshire police, who publicised in July 2017 its intention to record misogyny as a hate crime.

Despite that positive step forward, those local initiatives are just that—local, and not centrally monitored. We need amendments to existing legislation, or, at the very least, non-legislative changes to the list of centrally monitored hate crime characteristics to include sexual discrimination as the sixth strand. Misogyny is a hate crime. It is motivated by hostility, and it needs to be treated in exactly the same way as other hate crimes. It is now time for action, and time for victims to be given fair treatment.

10.8 am

**The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins):** I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) for calling the debate, particularly as tomorrow we celebrate International Women's Day, when I hope the House will have a long, thorough debate on the issues facing women—not just in this country, but across the world. One thing that, sadly, too few women across the world have is the right to participate in democratic processes. Today, we have seen how valuable the democratic processes of our country are. I hope very much that Back Benchers and those of us on the Front Benches do everything we can

to safeguard the principles of democracy in this great country. [Interruption.] It appears that I am in stereo as well.

I am also feeling a little bit rebellious. Pretty much for the first time on Sunday, I went on a march—I am not a frequent participant: the March4Women. We were joined by up to 10,000 supporters, and we took over the streets, perhaps in a way that the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) would have liked. It was an incredible experience to feel that energy and positivity, but sadly some of the women and men on the march also felt anger about some of the issues we have been discussing today. Against that backdrop, I congratulate the hon. Member for Great Grimsby on securing this debate, and other hon. Members on participating. I hope that this will lead to a continuation of such debates over the year—this year of all years.

The hon. Lady used one phrase that very much stuck in my mind: she described the abuse faced by girls and women in the street or workplace as "the wallpaper of their lives". I hope that we will get to a stage—sooner, rather than later—when that is no longer the case. The Government are clear that any crimes that target women, whether sexual offences, domestic abuse, or any other forms of abuse, are completely unacceptable and out of step with where we are as a society in 2018.

Since 2010 the Government have done more than ever to tackle these crimes, pledging £100 million over four years to support our ending violence against women and girls strategy, and committing to publish a landmark draft domestic abuse Bill. I hope that Members will use their networks to ensure a good response to the consultation when it is launched, and I am sure some of these issues will be raised during it. We play a leading role in the world in our response to violence against women and girls. We have introduced new offences for coercive and controlling behaviour, stalking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. We have banned revenge porn, and only last month the Sentencing Council announced increased sentences for domestic abuse, in recognition of the seriousness of such crimes.

Sadly, we know that women and girls face harassment and abuse all too often, and understandably people are calling for action. This involves not just women and girls, but men as well: I feel obliged to remind Members, in the heat of this issue and debate, that most men behave with decency, propriety and respect towards women. However, they are not the men we are worrying about in this debate, and today we want to focus on those who fall outside the majority and treat women in a disrespectful or abusive way.

**Melanie Onn:** I entirely support what the Minister is saying, and I feel strongly that men have a critical role in setting a positive example for young men who are growing up. I went running with my son, and someone in a van decided to beep as they drove past and shout something out of the window. My son was confused by that, and wanted to know what it was all about. I did not know where to start—I do not want to introduce the idea that such things are a common form of behaviour. The Minister is right in what she says, and I applaud her for setting it out so clearly.

**Victoria Atkins:** Indeed, and sometimes men can be the best feminists of all. My little boy is growing up thinking that of course women are Members of Parliament,

and of course they are Prime Ministers, because that is what he understands at the moment. The value of men in this debate is important and we all have supportive male colleagues. If we are honest, none of us—or very few of us—could do the amazing job of representing our constituencies in the House of Commons without support networks. Those networks could be male, female or whatever, but we need people behind us—our family and friends—to support us in this role. Men have a vital role in this debate.

Let me turn to current hate crime provisions; if I may, I will be quite detailed in my response on the law because we must take this issue step by step. Currently, specific hate crime provisions, including aggravated and incitement offences, and aggravated sentence uplift, are for offences that target race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender identity. Hate crimes are motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person on the basis of one or more of those five strands. It is a fundamental aspect of the legislation that those motivations can be proven to demonstrate the hate element, including where that leads to sentences being increased.

At the moment we have no clear evidence to show the extent to which the range of crimes committed against women and girls are specifically motivated by misogyny, which is defined as

“the dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.”

The police pilots that have been mentioned in this debate are of great interest to the Government. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby said, there are pilot areas across the country, including in Nottinghamshire, where it has been led by Sue Fish, the former chief constable of Nottinghamshire police. That approach has been used to help give women confidence to come forward to the police to report incidents, and to raise the priority of investigations and enhance support offered to women and girls. There has been positive early feedback from women and girls, and those who support them, which is why the National Police Chiefs' Council is gathering more data on those local initiatives. We will ask the police to feed back on the results of any pilots such as that in Nottinghamshire in recording misogyny as a hate crime.

However, we must be careful about creating laws that would inadvertently conflict with principles of equality. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is no longer in his place, but he raised a point about misandry. Under the Equalities Act 2010, certainly in the workplace we must balance the issue of equality. For example, our laws on religious hate crime provide equal protection for people of all faiths and of none. Equality of protection is a crucial element of ensuring public support for hate crime legislation. In other words, if we were to have hate crime in relation to gender, we would have to think carefully about whether that would apply to the entire population or just to half of it.

**Melanie Onn:** Rather than considering the barriers, I strongly request that the route to overcoming potential obstacles requires the intent of securing misogyny as an extension to the categorisations as its ultimate aim. Although issues may present themselves, I am sure the Minister has flexed her intellectual muscles on more

complex issues than this, and I hope she will apply similar rigour to achieving something that fundamentally could be really positive for our society.

**Victoria Atkins:** Very much so. I am setting out these points because one's instinctive reaction might be, “Yeah, let's go for it”. But we must be mindful of unintended and inadvertent consequences. I wonder whether hate crime legislation is definitively the best way to treat these crimes. Women are not a minority, and I would be hesitant to put us forward as one.

Perhaps I am a little more robust in the way that I would like this abuse and harassment to be treated. Within equalities legislation, it is being a minority covered by the five strands that causes something to fall under hate crime legislation. [*Interruption.*] I see that the hon. Member for Walthamstow is perched on her seat.

**Stella Creasy:** We must be very careful when we talk about being “robust”, because we are putting this back on to women and how they manage these experiences, rather than challenging the behaviour. The Minister says that this is about being a minority, but the disproportionate balance of power in our society means that one “minority”—men—have disproportionate power over women.

These incidents are about the abuse of that power, just as we see the abuse of people on the basis of their religious characteristics or ethnic identity. I do not think the Minister's minority/majority point is robust enough to defend not looking at whether, if we were to categorise misogyny as a hate crime, that would recognise fully the protected characteristic that we are seeking to include.

**Victoria Atkins:** I am so glad that the hon. Lady clarified that. I was not for a moment suggesting that women themselves must be more robust in the way they deal with such things. That is not my intention. I am saying that we as a society should be more robust.

It comes down to attitudes—something that has been raised a great deal in the debate. I am treading carefully at the moment with respect to equalities legislation because, as far as inserting anything into the current hate crime provisions is concerned, there are legal wrangles that we have to consider. We want to ensure that any changes that we make in the law to reflect the abuse in question would not have any impact on the five protected strands—of religion, and so on.

**Melanie Onn:** I thank the Minister for being generous in taking interventions. Does her concern about including misogyny in the legislative framework call into question the existing extensions, and what police forces are doing?

**Victoria Atkins:** No. At the moment we do not have any clear evidence and, as I have said, we welcome the evidence from the pilot projects. However, the practical legislative steps are what we must put our mind to—as we are doing. I am flagging them up as issues that we shall have to settle one way or another.

For example, there are high rates of under-reporting of the existing five strands of hate crime. We would not want to remove the focus from them, because we want to encourage more people to report that they have been

[*Victoria Atkins*]

abused racially or because of their religion. Perhaps the best way I can sum up our position is to say that the Government are listening.

There have been calls from both sides of the Chamber for a change in attitudes. When I practised at the criminal Bar, I used to say that by the time things have got to court the harm has been done, and it would be much better if they did not happen in the first place. We all need to challenge the attitudes that normalise or excuse the abuse and harassment of women. We have had examples today of the abuse that colleagues have, sadly, faced in their professional lives. I commend their calling out those instances of abuse. Perhaps I may say that I constantly admire the hon. Member for Swansea East (*Carolyn Harris*) for the beautiful necklaces that she always wears, and I do not understand why anyone would feel they had reason to make any criticism about that.

The Government Equalities Office is taking forward a programme of work to identify and challenge harmful social norms, ensuring that men and boys are included in the conversation as well as women. We need to ensure that all children grow up understanding that we should all be treated with respect, and not abused on the basis of gender, race or religion, and so on. Working with the Advertising Association, we have provided teachers and parents with resources to improve primary school children's resilience with respect to harmful gender stereotypes. In addition, following on from the successful "This is abuse" campaign—and it was successful in teaching people about what constitutes an abusive relationship and what should be normal and acceptable in a loving relationship—the Home Office and the Government Equalities Office have provided £3 million in the past year to develop and run a new "Disrespect NoBody" campaign, to tackle abuse within teenage relationships and encourage teens to rethink their views on violence, controlling behaviour and the meaning of consent in relationships.

Modern life can impinge on those matters as well, in the form of sexting and so on. We are also engaging with young people on questions of respect and equality to prevent such behaviour in the first place. That is why we have committed to making relationships education mandatory in all primary schools, and relationships and sex education mandatory in all primary schools from September next year.

**Stella Creasy:** I completely agree about the importance of getting sex and relationships education into every school. It is age-appropriate and sensitively done, so does the Minister share my concern that parental withdrawal might undermine the principle of giving every young person the best start in life and the best values about how we should treat each other?

**Victoria Atkins:** I must admit I am naturally cautious about the state interfering—or rather, because "interfering" is too pejorative a term, about the reach of the state into family life. Of course it is justified on occasion, but at the moment I do not have enough evidence to suggest that the rate of withdrawal would be very high; we simply do not know at the moment. Also, we should try to take parents with us. There is a lack of understanding

about the education intended for primary school children about relationships and respect. We need to explain that more, so that when children start to receive that education people understand the boundaries of what their seven, eight or nine-year-old will hear in school. I would naturally just pause before setting out such legislation to make it mandatory, before we have evidence about how many families are going to withdraw.

To move on to the legal framework, there are of course criminal laws that prohibit sexual harassment, assault and rape. They include the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which could cover sexual harassment, as well as the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Public Order Act 1986. We want women to know that those protections are there for them in law. It is also vital that when women and girls report their experiences they feel that they are treated with dignity and respect. We have recognised in our violence against women and girls strategy the gendered nature of crimes such as domestic abuse, sexual violence, so-called honour-based violence and stalking. As I have said, we have committed more than £100 million over this spending review period for critical services for victims of those crimes. We are committed to ensuring that victims of sexual assault have access to the specialist support that they need. We are also ensuring that the police and Crown Prosecution Service use the powers that they have to charge and prosecute for the abhorrent practice of upskirting. We are reviewing those powers to ensure that they are still fit for purpose.

Laws need to keep pace with modern life—and upskirting is, indeed, an example of that. We are determined that the internet should not be a safe place for those who carry out threatening or abusive behaviour online, whoever is being targeted. The Government are clear that what is illegal offline is illegal online.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Minister is being generous in giving way. I apologise for not being here earlier, as I was in Committee. She will be aware of Amnesty International's research into abuse of female MPs, which was published last year when I, along with the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary, were listed among the most abused UK female MPs. A lot of that abuse is misogynistic. What are the Government doing to address the abuse that is directed towards female MPs? We all know that the shadow Home Secretary gets by far the worst of it, but as the second most abused female MP in the UK I find the degree of homophobia, misogyny and anti-Catholic abuse that I must tolerate online quite shocking.

**Victoria Atkins:** That is disgraceful to hear. It comes to something, does it not, when colleagues have a league table of the people who receive the most abuse? It is a sorry sign, and the Prime Minister is absolutely committed to tackling the problem. The hon. and learned Lady may recall that on the day of the centenary of women's suffrage, the Prime Minister announced that we have commissioned the Law Commission to launch a review of the current legislation on offensive online communications to ensure that laws are up to date with technology. We have tackled the question of the treatment of women in public life—it is not just women Members in this place; we know that women who have any sort of high profile, whether through business, television or whatever, sadly get their share of abuse.

I was rather surprised when I gave an interview on that day and the person interviewing me asked me why I was not on Twitter. I said, very matter-of-factly, “I came off it because I got fed up with the abuse.” I thought no more of it; I did it quite some time ago. That seemed to attract attention. The reason I raise it is that I would like to emphasise to anyone who may be thinking of standing for public life that they do not have to be on Twitter if they do not want to be. If they want to be, fine, but equally it is not mandatory to be on Twitter if they do not want that side of things. There are other social media platforms, all of which I am sure everyone is very aware of.

**Joanna Cherry:** I take the Minister’s point that nobody has to be on Twitter, but does she agree with me that women in all walks of life should not feel forced off Twitter because they are abused simply for having the effrontery to hold a view and to articulate it?

**Victoria Atkins:** I would not describe myself as feeling forced to leave Twitter; I just took the decision. That is the point I am trying to get across. We are all trying, on a cross-party basis, to attract more women into politics. There is a great campaign called 50:50 Parliament, which is encouraging more women to stand, not just in national Parliament but in local councils and so on. I am just saying that there are many ways of doing this job, and it is one’s own choice.

**Mhairi Black:** I completely appreciate the point the Minister is making, and I have done the same thing; I have been on Twitter and said, “Oh, I can’t be bothered with that,” and I have put my phone away and not looked at it for a couple of weeks. That is fine, but the reality is that all the views are still there, whether or not I am online and looking at them. Whether or not we use Twitter, the vast majority of the public do. As long as they are in a sphere where that kind of stuff is acceptable and completely without consequences, our coming off Twitter does not solve anything.

**Victoria Atkins:** Of course. Social media and the tech companies are coming under a lot of attention at the moment for the way in which they are reacting not just to abuse online, but to the fact that criminals are using social media networks for horrific crimes such as child sexual exploitation and terrorist offences. As I see it, if we are not on the cusp of revolution, it feels as though we are perhaps beginning the beginning of the cusp of a revolution, in that we have got to a stage where we expect more from the people who run those great big companies and have such a sway over our day-to-day lives.

**Mhairi Black:** Is that not where Government step in and we lead by example? If we are able to say to the tech companies that we think they should be doing more to clamp down on such views, and if we, as the leaders of society, are looking at this cultural and structural problem and seeing that our society is poisoned with this stuff just now, it is on us to do something about it. It is not just for the Twitter and Facebook giants; it is on us.

**Victoria Atkins:** The hon. Lady will know that the Government are taking the issue seriously, particularly in the areas of counter-terrorism and the sexual exploitation

not just of children, but of women. We are taking it very seriously. Indeed, I was at a conference of the global partnership to end violence against children last month in Sweden. I was there to explain what the United Kingdom is doing to support the WePROTECT global alliance. That is an extraordinary, groundbreaking global alliance of Governments to tackle online child sexual exploitation; as we know, there are no geographical boundaries to it. I think I am right in saying that we are the highest contributor to the scheme, with £50 million, and we are doing some groundbreaking stuff on programmes that are creeping through the net and getting to the sites that are sharing the most appalling images.

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

**Victoria Atkins:** Will the hon. Lady forgive me? I am conscious that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby will want to respond, and I have two more pages, which may take me a couple of minutes.

On the issue of the internet, we have also published the internet safety strategy Green Paper to look at ways of tackling online abuse and harassment where they fall short of a criminal offence, such as, in some cases, trolling. That includes a commitment to introduce a voluntary social media code of practice. In addition, since 2015 we have introduced strong legislation to address revenge pornography—another way in which women can be humiliated online and have their lives affected by relationships that have since ended—and the helpline we funded has received more than 6,000 calls since 2015.

I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby for calling this debate. I will end on a positive note: this is the centenary of women’s suffrage, and I have promised friends and family that by the end of the year they will be thoroughly fed up with me using the phrase “Ask her to stand”. We have seen today in the Chamber the impact that women standing up and speaking on issues that matter to them and to their constituents can have. I am sure I am not alone in hoping that through this debate and our cross-party activities this year, we will encourage more women to stand not just for the House of Commons but for local government, local councils and devolved Assemblies and Parliaments. If more women stand for elected office to talk about and campaign on issues that they care about, they will make a difference. I will end with my hashtag, #askhertostand.

10.37 am

**Melanie Onn:** I thank the Minister for her very detailed and considered response. I genuinely urge her to take the points I have made seriously; they were made in good faith. I was determined to ensure that this debate would not be trivialised or minimised, and I tried as much as possible not to make it about us, because the issues that affect so many women in all our constituencies on a regular basis—from a very young age, which gives me such cause for concern—are important and should be at the forefront of our thoughts at all times.

This is a really important issue. It might start at the level of street harassment, but too often it ends up in much more serious offences. I have just been looking at my Twitter feed—perhaps I should come off it—and it

[Melanie Onn]

is now filled with comments asking if I have nothing better to do and whether there are not more pressing issues facing my constituents that I should be tackling. In my constituency we have an excessively high rate of domestic violence, and there are children in primary and secondary school who accept that violence in a relationship is somehow normal and to be expected. If, by challenging the acceptability of those attitudes, I can do anything to nip in the bud the extension of low-level abuse leading to more serious harassment, I will consider my time and Parliament's time very well spent. If that makes women come forward to report more incidents, it is certainly the right thing to do.

I want to come back on the Minister's point about the numerical minority of women. I suggest that the power imbalance in society leaves women in a minority position, whether that be in terms of equal pay, membership of company boards or our experience of harassment and abuse, which the statistics bear out. We are always put in a minority position, even if our numbers do not indicate that we should be.

On the points about existing legislation, so often the thresholds are not met and the police do not feel confident about taking forward cases. That leaves women feeling that they should not report, because the crimes are not deemed to be serious enough and insufficient action is taken as a result. It is clear to me from the testimony in the contributions that we have heard today that we must do all that we can to try to tackle the culture and attitude that seem so pervasive in society today. Until we do that, we will not start to see the positive impact that the Minister is working so valiantly towards achieving when it comes to much more serious crimes, such as domestic violence and rape. I thank her very much for her consideration and thank everyone for their contributions, which are very much appreciated.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered misogyny as a hate crime.

10.41 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Fairly Traded Goods

10.58 am

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered support for fairly traded goods.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and to be the standard bearer for fair trade in Fairtrade fortnight. I do that as a proud Co-operative and Labour, as well as Welsh, MP.

Ten years ago, Wales became the first fair trade nation in the world. Swansea is a fair trade city. Four out of five local authorities in Wales are fair trade, as are all the churches and 150 of the schools, which represents 20% of the stock of fair trade schools in Britain. We take fair trade very seriously in Wales, as do others, because the world trading system is rigged in favour of the more powerful players, be they multinationals or big countries, arranging trade agreements in their own interest. As the Minister knows, fair trade is about giving a fair price, fair living standards and sustainable situations for smaller producers in Fairtrade-accredited industries.

People will know about the example of bananas. I am sure that, like me, you enjoy a banana, Sir David. Bananas are the most popular fruit in Britain and around 6 billion are consumed here each year. Fairtrade bananas, which are now commonplace in supermarkets, show that the right price is paid. That is translated into working conditions, living wages, the permission to have organisational safety standards and, often, a Fairtrade premium, which can be invested in schools and education. Fairtrade farmers say that that generally increases their income by 34%.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this issue forward. Does he agree that this £2 billion annual enterprise does so much good and that the message must be sent that an extra 5p or 10p for a fair trade product does not make any difference to us in this country, but means life or death for the farmer, who is getting a fair price for his goods, so we do not mind paying that?

**Geraint Davies:** I very much agree. A small increment in the price in the supermarket makes a massive difference to the take-home pay of the producers, who are often exploited. The hon. Gentleman knows that a third of the world's population live on less than \$1 a day. We must ask, who are those people? How can we help them? How significant is that help? A few pence on the price of a banana makes a massive difference.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, and I congratulate him on securing the debate. It is Fairtrade fortnight, which presents a fantastic opportunity relating to his point about knowing who benefits. I congratulate the Fairtrade Foundation and others that host fair trade producers in the UK so that those producers can share their stories. Those stories are incredibly powerful and bring fair trade to life for lots of consumers in the UK. As much of that work that we can do, the better. It really does bring this issue to life for people.

**Geraint Davies:** I agree with my hon. Friend. We can do a lot in this place to secure and augment fair trade through our trade negotiations, but ultimately consumer power is what really puts pressure on politicians and on producers to produce fairly. People understanding their choice about a product makes a real difference at the coalface, the banana plantation, the tea plantation or whatever. When people make those choices, they make a difference. In turn, producers will change their minds and Governments will listen. Those organisations, keeping hope alive, keeping the campaign going and awareness are all crucial to create a better world, which otherwise will be naturally fixed in favour of the larger, more powerful players.

I am not going to go through all the markets, as time does not permit, but people will be familiar with gold, which symbolises love, power and wealth, but not for the people producing it. They may be in appalling conditions and having to use mercury and other toxic and hazardous products to process that gold. Therefore, it is important to have minimum prices, living wages and environmental conditions such as clean air. Those are underpinned by fair trade standards and are, again, why fair trade is so important.

I am a Member for the Co-operative party—a big group in Parliament. From the outset, the Co-op party has been instrumental in changing the way businesses are delivered in the interests of both workers and consumers. It has been a pioneer of the fair trade movement and wants to see it going forward. I am proud of that and want the Government to encourage more co-operatives alongside fairer trade.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case for fair trade. Will he join me in recognising the important role of local groups, such as those in Selkirk and Melrose in my constituency, which do so much to promote fair trade? I will visit Selkirk's Fairtrade pop-up shop on Friday, which will be promoting Fairtrade products. In addition, young people play an important role in educating society and the wider community about the importance of fair trade. Does he agree that young people are the great champions and ambassadors of fair trade and should be encouraged?

**Geraint Davies:** I completely agree. I support the local initiatives that the hon. Gentleman mentioned and the granular approach to fair trade. Ultimately, we as individuals, buying bananas, coffee, gold or whatever, will have a direct impact on the livelihoods of small families producing those products elsewhere.

As the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) suggested, young people with their lives ahead of them often think about what is right and wrong in this world, and think, "How can I affect that? Am I powerless and therefore disinterested in the political process?" They want to engage in this sort of thing both politically and in the choices they make, the people they talk to and how they influence their family and community. It is imperative that we have consumer push, as well as policy direction, to deliver fairer trade. Those will be alongside the powers in the marketplace that are honing down to stop that happening, in the interests of pure profit and cost reduction—but consumers can often afford to pay these prices.

The nub of the issue is that, in every probability, we are approaching Brexit. How will our trade arrangements be made? Can we sustain, enhance and build on what we have done with fair trade, or do we face real pressures to be like *Oliver Twist* in our global trading position and say, "Can I have some more?", while turning our back on Europe? The reality is that Europe has high terms of reference in trade. I would like assurance from the Minister that we expect our future trade relations at least to match what the European Union enjoys in ensuring sustainable, environmentally friendly and fair trade in its dealings.

There are concerns that we will be under pressure from the United States, which has become more protectionist with its talk about tariffs, or big players such as the Chinese. We need assurances in black and white in the Trade Bill and the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill that we will keep the highest standards in our trading agreements. For that, transparency, scrutiny and agreement of future trade agreements are required so that people can rest assured that environmental standards, human rights and living standards will be protected to a minimum guaranteed level.

I am interested to hear the Minister's comments on how we can ensure that the value and volume of fair trade that we import to Britain are at least sustained, and ideally grown. What mechanisms can we use to sustain those, rather than just hoping for the best?

There are concerns from the Fairtrade Foundation and the Trade Justice Movement, which said that the current situation is not fit for purpose. We face an opportunity for more transparency, more scrutiny and more assurances on fair trade, with a view to helping environmental sustainability, sustaining human rights, rather than making them worse, and meeting our sustainable development goals. I would be grateful for the Minister's assurances on that.

As we move towards Brexit and turn our back on the EU marketplace, I fear that we will be hobbled because of economic pressures and that we will not be as able to take global leadership in this area. Places around the world, including the Commonwealth, have historically seen Britain as a trading pioneer that has set standards for an environmentally and morally—in terms of living standards—sustainable world. We need to have down in black and white the ways in which we will ensure that we keep those high standards in future.

I intend to table amendments to the Trade Bill to ask for scrutiny and for assurance that the minimum trading standards that we enjoy in the EU will be sustained, which would mean that we could all look forward to a fairer, more equal world as trade inevitably increased and that the poorest families would benefit from trade, rather than inequality growing in the world we share.

11.10 am

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) on securing this important debate during Fairtrade fortnight about the valuable role that Fairtrade plays for us as consumers. It is a familiar, well-known brand that we all recognise, including children choosing bananas in the supermarket. Many years of work have gone into building up the brand.

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

It is wonderful to see the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Fairtrade, the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch). The all-party group plays an important role in keeping that valued brand at the forefront of our minds during Fairtrade fortnight.

**Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): Before I was elected to this place, I was proud to bring a motion to my borough council to make Ipswich a Fairtrade town. Does the Minister agree that having Fairtrade councils that lead at the forefront through education will have a greater impact on consumer behaviour than if we leave it up to advertisers and individuals?

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Gentleman gives an important example of the valuable role that local councils and councillors can play. Parliament is also involved in promoting Fairtrade goods. It was wonderful to hear from the hon. Member for Swansea West about the remarkable example of support for Fairtrade from people across Wales.

I very much welcome Fairtrade fortnight, which is a fantastic opportunity for UK consumers and businesses to stand together to emphasise the important link between what we consume in the UK and the farmers and workers who grow our food produce, and to show our support for fairly traded goods.

**Geraint Davies:** I am grateful for what the Minister said about Wales. Does she agree that it is imperative to ensure that consumers across Britain know when they are buying Fairtrade goods and to highlight the fact that those choices exist, from the Government's point of view? That would put further pressure on producers. We do not want a situation where people do not realise they have Fairtrade options and so cannot make the positive choices that influence producers and the end result. Will she do everything she can to ensure that everybody knows what they are eating and that those choices exist?

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Gentleman is right, and he rightly uses his position and this fortnight to make the point across the United Kingdom about the valuable Fairtrade brand—obviously, other approaches are available, as they say on the BBC about particular products. Fairtrade has done a tremendous job of instilling its brand in the mind of the British consumer; the UK leads other markets around the world on recognition of that brand, although it is recognised in other countries. Fairtrade shows us real examples of the links between workers and consumers, which is very powerful.

**Geraint Davies:** What does the Minister think about the danger of the Fairtrade brand being undermined by half-weight replicas when companies say, “Oh, this is sort of fair”? There is confusion because we know what the Fairtrade brand delivers and we want that to grow, but if companies that are not properly Fairtrade have something that sounds a bit like it, and consumers think, “That sounds all right,” that is a worry—it is Fairtrade-lite.

**Harriett Baldwin:** I think the hon. Gentleman is indirectly alluding to another major supermarket that came up with a different approach. He will be aware

that the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) has been in touch with the Advertising Standards Authority and that it ruled on the situation today. I will not dwell on that, because it is a matter for the Advertising Standards Authority, but I join him in celebrating the fact that the Fairtrade brand has stood the test of time. As consumers, we all know and understand it. I welcome his championing of that. It is also important that, as a Labour and Co-operative MP, he highlights the work that the Co-op does in stocking Fairtrade brands.

I am happy to highlight the work that the Department has done over a long period to support Fairtrade and the principles it stands for of free, fair and inclusive trade. It is one of the cornerstones of our economic development strategy, which sets out our plans to promote economic growth and decent jobs worldwide, and ultimately to build a safer, healthier, more prosperous world. To do that, and to achieve those really stretching sustainable development goals by 2030, we will need to continue to work in partnership with businesses, non-governmental organisations, producers and consumers on the important agenda that the hon. Gentleman highlights.

The UK public have demonstrated enormous commitment to Fairtrade, not only in Wales but across the land. There are some 600 Fairtrade communities—including Ipswich, as we heard—and 1,000 Fairtrade academic institutions that help to promote the message. In 2016, the Fairtrade market in the UK generated £32.3 million in premiums, which is money that goes directly to farmers and workers in developing countries. Those communities lead on what the money is spent on, which empowers workers to decide what their priorities are. Last night, I had the privilege of meeting Ketra, a coffee farmer from Uganda, who pointed to the improvements that have occurred over time in her community as a result of that premium.

Fairtrade plays a vital role in ensuring that the rights of workers at the bottom of the supply chain are recognised—an important issue that the hon. Gentleman highlighted—and that businesses have the tools to prevent and stop exploitation. The Government are fully committed to supporting that through the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

**Holly Lynch:** The Minister is being very generous with her time. When the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) was Secretary of State, I met her to talk about the Fairtrade principles. One of the most exploitative industries around the world is mining—a point made powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies). Fairtrade Gold has done some fantastic work in the industry, and the former Secretary of State was interested in liaising with the Fairtrade Foundation to see what more DFID could do to apply Fairtrade principles to mining around the world. Will the Minister update us on whether that appetite is still there and whether there have been any new developments?

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Lady raises a really important point that applies not only to gold, but to so many other minerals; some of the working conditions for people in the cobalt industry are absolutely scandalous. I will follow up on her point and elaborate more on what we are doing, because she makes a very powerful suggestion. When we buy phones, for example, we should know that the minerals in them have been mined in good working conditions.

We are working with Fairtrade to develop Fairtrace, a new supply chain mapping tool for cocoa, coffee and tea that will help UK brands and consumers to better understand where their products come from. Companies that have gone through the Fairtrace process include the Co-op and Ben and Jerry's.

We face many great challenges. More than 40 million men, women and children are working in conditions of modern slavery around the world—a statistic that I find absolutely startling. We cannot help to lift millions of people in the developing world out of poverty without tackling the exploitation of workers in global supply chains. This debate has rightly brought gold and mined metals to the fore. Clearly, more trade on fair terms is the key engine for poverty reduction. Through fair trade, we can increase trade and create a progressive trade policy that increases prosperity for all, acts as a lever for equality and leaves no-one behind.

**Geraint Davies:** Perhaps the Minister was about to answer this, but what red lines and constraints are the Government planning to put in trade deals? Obviously transparency and scrutiny are a different issue, but what is the plan to discourage trade with those who exploit the 40 million people in modern slavery?

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, although I have to say that I disagree with his party's stance on the customs union because it is really important that as we leave the European Union we can work through trade issues as a sovereign nation. DFID is working closely with the Department for International Trade to ensure that development and global prosperity are at the heart of UK trade and investment policy. Our focus is on helping countries in the developing world to leave their aid dependency behind and become our trade partners of the future. Our key priority is to ensure that our trading relationships with developing countries are not disrupted by our choice to leave the European Union.

We are working to ensure continuity in our relationships with approximately 100 developing countries, which will provide a strong platform to deepen trade and investment partnerships. We are supporting developing countries to take better advantage of trading opportunities. We will build on our track record as a champion of trade and development by offering an integrated trade

and development package that improves our trade offer to developing countries. We are fully committed to ensuring the maintenance of high standards of consumer, worker and environmental protection in all our trade agreements. I hope that that statement reassures the hon. Gentleman.

**Geraint Davies:** The Minister is being very generous with her time. Will data be available to show that we are increasing our focus on the value and volume of fair trade? We need examples of products that have been traced back to their origin to show that they do not come from circumstances of exploitation. I hope she shares my ambition, because the public want to know that they are buying better products from fairer trade. There is an onus on the Government to provide that information and encourage that practice. Can she say anything else about her work with the Department for International Trade to ensure that those values are instilled in trade deals?

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Gentleman raises data. He will be aware of how protracted the process is; he will also be aware of DFID's commitment to the Fairtrace process that I outlined, which is very much about ensuring we have data that companies can work through with their supply chains.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Commonwealth. I am very much looking forward to the opportunities that will arise from our hosting the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government summit, the theme of which is "Towards a Common Future". We will really be able to emphasise inclusive, fair trade, and it will be a great opportunity to hear developing country perspectives and drive forward this important agenda. More than a million Fairtrade farmers and workers live in Commonwealth countries; through a fair and transparent trade system, we can secure a more prosperous future for them and for everyone in the Commonwealth.

The Government will continue to champion trade that is free and fair and that helps to tackle the exploitation of workers; create a trade system that works for everyone, including the very poorest; and eliminate poverty through inclusive economic growth.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.25 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Local Museums

[MRS ANNE MAIN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered local museums.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main.

I should perhaps explain the genesis of the debate to Members, as many people have asked me why I want to raise this interesting subject. Two months ago, there was a threat to one of the local museums in my constituency—a council-supported museum. The Stirling Smith was threatened with closure following the publication of proposals by the local authority to remove its budget over the next five years. In fact, some Members might have signed my early-day motion to bring pressure to bear. That pressure was ultimately successful, because in addition to the actions of hon. Members in this House there was a huge public petition and the council decided not to remove funding from the Stirling Smith, which was a good decision.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for securing this important debate. On the issue of local authority-funded museums, does he agree that it is concerning that 39% of them have seen funding cut and 85% have cut their hours? Obviously, that will have a knock-on effect on the wonderful services they provide, such as those provided by the Elsecar Heritage Centre in my constituency in Barnsley.

**Stephen Kerr**: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention and if she will bear with me, I shall come to that very subject later in my speech.

I believe that it is time for the House to consider the impact that local museums have on our country and our local communities. A lot of major issues affect our museums and I will speak about a number of them today. I also look forward to hearing other Members from across the United Kingdom talk about their local museums; in Stirling, we have a number.

**Gloria De Piero** (Ashfield) (Lab): May I pay tribute to the D. H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum in Eastwood, which is in my constituency? We are fortunate that such a famous literary figure was born in Eastwood and I would like us to be able to do more to celebrate him. However, does the hon. Gentleman not agree that, given local authority cuts have been so drastic, lottery funding needs shaking up? Cities have got all this funding, but lottery cash needs to go to towns as well, so that we can do more to protect and promote our local museums.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair)**: Before I ask Mr Kerr to respond to that, I will point out that we are having mini-speeches. If hon. Members desire to speak, there are plenty of opportunities for them to do so, if they try to catch my eye. Mr Kerr, can we keep interventions brief? Thank you.

**Stephen Kerr**: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) for her intervention and for highlighting that issue. Of course, she highlights the

importance of the heritage that our museums represent, but they represent much more. In Stirling, we have a number of museums. The Stirling Smith is the principal museum of the city, but we also have the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum in Stirling castle, the Dunblane Museum and a number of other smaller museums. That is alongside the major tourist attractions that we have in Stirling, such as Stirling castle itself, which is also home to the famous and internationally important Stirling heads.

**Mike Hill** (Hartlepool) (Lab): In Hartlepool, we have a local museum, which is the Royal Navy museum of the north, and a volunteer-run museum at the Heugh battery on the Headland. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such independent museums are important to the local economy and the tourist industry?

**Stephen Kerr**: Those museums absolutely are important. Museums such as the one the hon. Gentleman refers to build pride in our heritage and define who we are as a people.

The battle of Bannockburn visitor centre tells visitors about the most important battle in the history of Scotland—and perhaps of England. There is also the national Wallace monument, which holds William Wallace's original sword. The sword is an impressive sight, standing some 5 feet 4 inches high. The Secretary of State for Defence visited my constituency recently and I took him on a little tour. We passed by the field of the battle of Bannockburn and I told him about what had happened there, and then we passed by Stirling bridge, and I told him about what had happened there. He said, "Is there anywhere round here that I will feel safe?" I replied, "I don't think so, Secretary of State." It is a glorious history that we celebrate and our museums play an important part in preserving, archiving and displaying it.

When the art gallery at the Stirling Smith was threatened, I dropped in to speak to the director of the museum, Dr Elspeth King, who is herself a phenomenon. A five-minute conversation with Elspeth is more informative than many hours of sitting in this place listening to debates; I can assure people of that. She is a treasure trove of knowledge and her contribution to civic life in Stirling is exemplary, as she is the chief custodian of the history of our city and district.

The Stirling Smith is a fantastic museum, which was founded in 1869. It was based on the philanthropy of Thomas Stewart Smith, who so far is the only artist in Scotland to have set up a museum and art gallery for the public. He made his money from the sale of the Glassingall estate and from his success as a painter. He signed his will promising the money to the Provost of Stirling to set up a museum in November 1869, but sadly he died only a few weeks later.

Philanthropists such as Smith have set up museums all across the country. However, unlike libraries, which were often set up in the same way, there is no statutory duty for councils to provide museums. Philanthropy of this nature is of huge significance and essential for the future of museums.

**Ross Thomson** (Aberdeen South) (Con): In my constituency of Aberdeen South, we have the museum of the Gordon Highlanders, which is the Scottish regiment that Winston Churchill described as one of the finest in

the world. It faces the same challenges as other museums and is running a fundraising campaign. The aim is to raise £100,000 a year over the next three years, and because of the generosity of spirit of Aberdonians the museum is succeeding in that endeavour. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating all the people who have supported that initiative and also welcome the fact that the local council has also given the museum some money in its recent budget?

**Stephen Kerr:** I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the people of Aberdeen on their generosity. Those are two things that often do not run together in a sentence, but on this occasion they absolutely do—the “generosity” of “the people of Aberdeen”.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Kerr:** You're not from Aberdeen, are you?

**Rachael Maskell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I obviously represent the fine city of York, which is littered with amazing museums. However, there is a real challenge here. Local authority cuts have meant that funding for museums has also been cut, and ultimately that means that some people have to pay to access these collections. Should they not be accessible to all the public for free?

**Stephen Kerr:** I totally agree on the issue relating to accessibility. There are many advantages to companies and individuals making payments to support museums, but the major national museums in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh often get a bigger share of the pie than the smaller ones. In Stirling, we have superb commercial engagement with local companies, such as United Auctions, which is a major sponsor of the Stirling Smith. I urge more national companies and people of significant wealth not to ignore their local museums.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and he is making an excellent point. May I “out-namecheck” all the other museums that have been mentioned so far, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the British Museum? To reinforce his point, is he aware of the programme that the British Museum runs to lend parts of its collections to local and regional museums? That can help to boost the attractiveness of and visitor numbers to regional and local museums, which will help them.

**Stephen Kerr:** That is wonderful news and I would certainly embrace the opportunity to have parts of the British Museum's collection come to Stirling and appear in the Stirling Smith Museum, if that is at all possible; I hope it is.

One of the most famous exhibits in the Stirling Smith Museum is a football, which is the world's oldest. It was found resting in the rafters of the great hall of Stirling castle, having been kicked up there some time during the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots, perhaps even by the great lady herself.

That football is just one of a number of Stirling's artefacts that have toured internationally; it even visited the World Cup when the tournament was held in Germany

in 2006. The Stirling Smith Museum also holds the oldest curling stone in the world, which is pertinent, given that we have just had the winter Olympics.

Such artefacts of global significance are found in many local collections around the country. The international impact of those objects, and the ability to use them to improve our cultural influence around the world, should not be underestimated. I remember when the Wallace sword left Stirling to go to New York. I am told that an airline seat had to be booked for it. That was before the current airline restrictions, as I cannot imagine a 5 feet 4 inch broadsword getting through security these days.

Also in the Stirling Smith is the Neish collection of pewter, which is a collection of global significance. The highlight for me is a Roman nipple protector, which is a fascinating piece. Apparently, nipple protectors were worn by Roman soldiers under their armour to prevent chafing. It is a collection that attracts international academic and design interest.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has got a good point there. [*Laughter.*]

**Stephen Kerr:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support.

Local museums are a superb way for people to interact with their own local stories; they are a way of understanding those stories. In Stirling, the museums are a way for us to understand locally how we have interacted with the national aspects of our history. Stirling is a place where many things of national importance have happened and, I hasten to add, continue to happen. I have already mentioned the battles of Bannockburn and of Stirling Bridge.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not only local artefacts that we can see in local museums, but artefacts that represent the history of our country, Great Britain? Chippenham Museum is having a refurb by the Arts Council that will allow it to have artefacts from the V&A—

**Mrs Anne Main** (in the Chair): Order. Interventions should be brief. If the hon. Lady wishes to make a speech, she should by all means do so.

**Stephen Kerr:** I welcome the news that my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) has just shared with colleagues. As the Member of Parliament for Stirling, I cannot mention the battles of Bannockburn and of Stirling Bridge too often. They happened in Stirling and are major aspects of the wars of independence. Globally significant events happened in our backyard. We feel differently about these events from people from elsewhere in Scotland because they are part of our local history. Stirling was besieged during the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, when Stirling High School was already 150 years old. I often wonder whether the students got the day off when the battle of Bannockburn was fought.

Globally, Bannockburn was an important turning point in western European history. Nationally, it solidified Scotland's place in the world for 300 years. Locally, people had to live with it, and still have to live with it today. We are proud of it. To understand these events in their entirety, we have to understand how the global,

[Stephen Kerr]

national and local fit together. The Stirling Smith has caltrops that would have been used to immobilise the English cavalry in the 14th century, as well as souvenirs and guidebooks that were sold from the visitor centre in the 19th century. The Smith is literally a stakeholder, as it has a number of the wooden stakes that might have been used at the battle of Bannockburn.

The effort over many years to preserve and protect our history is breath-taking. The Smith prevented the destruction of the Stirling heads from Stirling castle, which were being rolled down the hill for the entertainment of the troops stationed at the castle. Allegedly, a museum curator dug the original plans for the Wallace monument out of a skip. The museum team encouraged the donation of a piece of tarpaulin that was covering someone's woodpile. It turned out to be the miners' banner from the Fallin pit during the 1984 strike. We should not underestimate the importance of museums in preserving our local, national and global history.

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** My hon. Friend is making a good speech on important matters, but does he not recognise that this is not just about fixed museum space? There are temporary museum spaces, such as The Core in Solihull, which has many fine exhibitions of art, local histories and many people's stories.

**Stephen Kerr:** I absolutely acknowledge that fact.

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, like parks, museums deserve special protection? At the moment, there is no protection for either of those important features that everyone values.

**Stephen Kerr:** Museums and parks deserve protection and the affection of the community, which they have, as we witnessed when the Stirling Smith Museum was threatened. I want to mention in passing the Friends of the Smith, because they devote hours of their time to raise money, conduct tours and help out in many ways to ensure that the Stirling Smith Museum operates fully. That is evidence of the affection and devotion that local people have for their museum.

That brings me to the Dunblane Museum. The Dunblane Museum started life as the Dunblane Cathedral Museum and is a fantastic museum dedicated to preserving the history of the ancient borough of Dunblane. It has a nationally significant collection of communion tokens—the largest in the UK. It holds many items from the cathedral in Dunblane. Perhaps my favourite is a bag that belonged to an 18th-century newspaper boy or girl. This is a museum that truly delivers—boom, boom! The fact that the Dunblane Museum is entirely staffed by volunteers shows the dedication and service of members of the community, such as the honorary curator, Marjorie Davies, and the rest of the team. These are people who want to serve their community, and volunteers have been protecting the museum collection since it was established in 1943. It attracts 10,000 visitors a year. People leave knowing more about Dunblane and its long and distinguished history.

Volunteers struggle, though, because we put more and more expectations on them in regulatory terms. We require them to register with the charity regulator, we require health

and safety protection and we require data protection. All that adds to the burden on volunteer groups and disproportionately affects independent volunteer museums that have to do all that while raising the money to keep the lights on. Forms and applications are the bane of all charitable organisations' lives, and we have a duty to keep those things as minimal as we can while still protecting the public. I saw the Stirling Smith's submission to be recognised as a museum of national significance, and it was a vast document akin to a PhD thesis.

The third museum in my area that I must mention is the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum. Stirling has a long and distinguished connection with the military of this country. We claim the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders as our own regiment. As the old regiment fought two world wars and countless other conflicts around the world, I cannot imagine that filling in a few forms would intimidate the august institution that is dedicated to its history. Preserving the history of our military is essential, and such museums play a huge part in telling people the story of a regiment that is now merged into the Royal Regiment of Scotland.

That the Argylls are a part of our history and not our future continues to be a note of sadness for me and many other people in the Stirling area, but the history must be preserved. The museum has a superb collection of objects and artefacts from the hundreds of years of military conflict that the Argylls have been involved with. It holds family medals in its vaults, making them accessible for future generations and preventing loss. Again, the local family stories mix with our national story of military commitment playing its part in a global history that goes from the Khyber pass to the fields of France.

Local museums make a huge contribution to life in the UK. They preserve our heritage, help us to understand who we are and create the golden thread from the local to the national to the global. That brings me to a number of questions that I want to raise. I am afraid there are some differences between England and Scotland on these issues, and I acknowledge that from the outset, but why should that be the case, given the level of co-operation around the UK? Before I am interrupted by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), I hasten to add that I am not suggesting a power grab; I am calling for better collaboration and co-operation, as was mentioned earlier in an intervention about the British Museum.

The national collections in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff should be spread out and accessible. To do that, we need a shake-up of how we indemnify the objects in our museums. I have waxed lyrical about the museums in my constituency, and people might think that I am talking about a museum of national, if not global, significance when I talk about the Smith. The real tragedy is that it is not considered to be such. The bar for a local museum to be considered a museum of national importance is set worryingly high. The committee that makes those decisions is known as the committee of significance. Despite an application outlining all of the wondrous national and internationally significant elements of the museum, it is not considered to be of national significance. Perth and Clydebank museums are museums of national significance, while Stirling and Kirkcaldy, despite the latter's linoleum collection and superb art collection, recently had their applications knocked back. That is not right. Setting museums against

each other is not a useful or good thing to do, and I question the judgment of those charged with such decisions. The Mendoza review in England seems to address some of those issues. Why can they not also be addressed in Scotland?

The question of how museums can gain Government indemnity requires some thought. Government indemnity allows museums to access insurance for items that would be prohibitively expensive to insure. The major national collections are disjointed in how they make decisions. The Government need to consider a single indemnity scheme for the UK. It would help museums lend confidently and borrow well to enrich local communities across the country. It would allow the national collections to be available throughout these islands, bringing exciting and uplifting exhibits to the whole UK.

The treasure trove rules should also be considered. Again, in Scotland we have a different regime, although it follows the English system fairly closely. Treasure trove rules allow people who have found items to sell them to a museum with an assessed reward. The level of reward that has to be paid makes it difficult for local museums to acquire those items. A scheme to allow museums to acquire locally found items at a cheaper rate would help. An example would be the golden torcs found near Blair Drummond in my constituency. Those torcs are beautiful—they are superb examples of Celtic craftsmanship—but to see them people have to go to Edinburgh, where they are part of a large collection. That removes their local significance and what they tell us about the Celtic trading tradition in Stirlingshire, to add to a national story. When artefacts are removed from their local context they lose the local part of their story, contributing only to the national or global story.

The Dumfriesshire hoard suffered the same fate when the local museum was deemed too unsecure to show it and did not have the resources to buy it. It was one of the largest hoards of Viking materials recently to be discovered. Artefacts of huge importance to Dumfriesshire were removed from the community in which they were found. When we consider issues such as the treasure trove rules or Government indemnity, more flexibility is needed. If we lock away our treasures, whether they be national or local, we make our story smaller and lose a part of our identity.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's points about repatriating, so to speak, various items from collections. Does he acknowledge that items sometimes need to be kept in particular conditions, and that support and extra investment are required for that?

**Stephen Kerr:** I understand that what I am proposing is not without challenges, but it is right to put locally discovered artefacts, which are critical to the local story of the communities we live in, in the community so that people can have the marvellous experience of understanding who they are in a long line of generations of people who have lived in that area.

**Rachael Maskell:** Will the hon. Gentleman congratulate the National Railway Museum, which recently gifted one of its engines to Swanage Railway so that it could be returned to its home environment and enjoyed by the wider population?

**Stephen Kerr:** That sounds like a jolly good idea.

**Deidre Brock:** To follow the hon. Gentleman's train of thought, I wonder what his thoughts are on repatriating the Lewis chessmen from the British Museum up to the Western Isles.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Before I ask Mr Kerr to continue, could I ask that he is given a moment to respond to one intervention before another is thrown his way? Mr Kerr, you might wish to deal with any residual remarks that you had from the previous intervention.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am very happy with the remarks that I offered in connection with the first intervention. On the second intervention, I understand the merits, as I am trying to make clear in my speech, of making the artefacts of these islands available to all the people of these islands. They should be made accessible on the basis not of words such as "repatriation", but of their availability to be displayed. I understand that there are challenges, but we should address those challenges. Such items tell our story, and they should be available to us so that we understand who we are, what our progenitors have done and what our future holds. All those things make up the golden thread that I am trying to describe. We need to follow the old adage of being risk-aware rather than risk-averse, lest we stop people accessing those parts of our heritage found in treasure trove or in the national collections. We will all be richer if we move in that direction.

I do not wish to dwell on museum funding, as the particular issues of museum funding in my constituency have been resolved thanks to public pressure. I am sure that many Members will want to reflect on funding, but there is one point that I would like to make. New acquisitions in museums are essential not only to enrich and enliven the position of a local museum, but as a way of recording the present, which will turn into the past. I am sure I am not alone among Members in being astonished to see things from my childhood enshrined in local museums. I recently attended an exhibition in a museum and discovered that a picture of my class of 1976 is now one of the exhibits, so I stand before hon. Members as—partially, at least—a museum exhibit.

**Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned his childhood, which he spent in my constituency of Angus. I want to highlight the importance of museums in Angus. For example, the birthplace of J.M. Barrie, the creator of Peter Pan, is in Kirriemuir. Does my hon. Friend agree that museums are incredibly valuable to our local economy, and they drive into the local area thousands of tourists who would not come otherwise?

**Stephen Kerr:** It is impossible to visit Kirriemuir without visiting the birthplace of the great J.M. Barrie, just as it is impossible to visit Forfar without visiting the Meffan, which is another great museum and exhibition space.

Museum exhibits—whether they be old food packaging, shop equipment or other accoutrements of daily life—bring back memories. I would consider these examples to be from the recent past, but it turns out that flared trousers and John Denver albums are museum pieces now.

[Stephen Kerr]

Local museums can and must be allowed to acquire items of significance from their local community as they go, collecting history as it happens. They must have the money to do that. Although philanthropy and corporate giving play a huge part in that, museums need to have state funding to keep the lights on while they collect. I am proud that in Stirling we have a common good fund, which allows the acquisition of items for the Smith collection alongside a strong corporate and philanthropic effort.

We should reflect on what happens when that goes wrong. To that end, I will touch briefly on the tragedy of the MacFarlane collection in Bridge of Allan. That museum was unloved, and then the Army was billeted in the museum, during which time the soldiers used the large collection of stuffed animals for target practice. After the war, the museum was turned into a concert hall of some significance. Many in Bridge of Allan, my home town, still talk fondly of the time that the Beatles played at the museum hall. The building lay derelict for a long time, and has now been turned into flats. They are lovely flats, but the community of Bridge of Allan is a bit poorer for the MacFarlane museum no longer being there. The community of Stirling is a bit poorer, and I would contend that we are all a bit poorer.

Stirling has an incredible political history, which is well recorded in its museums, especially the Smith. I am often reminded that Stirling has recently produced two Secretaries of State for Scotland, Tom Johnston and Michael Forsyth, as well as the Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman. The place of honour that they have in Stirling, as a city proud of its heritage, only puts more pressure on the sitting MP. A young Harold Wilson stared up at the statue of Henry Campbell-Bannerman that adorns our city centre and thought it would be a good thing to be Prime Minister.

The former Member for North West Lanarkshire, Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham, has the record of founding two political parties represented in the House of Commons—not mine, but the Scottish Labour party and the Scottish National party. He is commemorated as a local boy made good in Stirling. He is one of our own. The Stirling Smith has his riding boots, his smiddy—Graham was famous as a horse-breeder and adventurer—and, most impressively, his coffin plate, which was considered too nice to be buried with him, and was preserved for posterity. Other fascinating items hung in the Smith museum include facsimile copies of the 16th-century Stirling heads. One of them bears an uncanny, striking resemblance to another great Prime Minister: Margaret Thatcher. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] I knew that would get a response from certain Members present today.

I have spoken for long enough about the collections in my local museums and what they can tell us about our present and our future. I will conclude with a description of one item in the collection. In a corner of the Smith is a piece of mutton bone. Unremarkable as it may seem, that bone is of huge local, national and international importance. The bone was removed from the throat of the young James Drummond, who had been slowly dying as it lay lodged in his throat. James was saved, and that inspired a deep religious faith in the Drummond family, who used their fortune to build a great deal in Stirling. They built the internationally

significant cemetery grounds, which follow a pattern of heaven laid out in the Bible. They built an agricultural improvement business, which improved land and made Stirling the agricultural capital it is today. They built a huge religious tract publishing house, and the needs of their workforce led to the invention of the pre-packed sandwich—so Greggs has the Drummonds to thank. The religious and temperance printing venture facilitated the construction of the large post office that is now, ironically, a public house; they were very much in favour of temperance. To top it all off, that tracheotomy in 1843 was the first recorded.

Local museums preserve our history and our culture. They allow us to look to the future, secure in the knowledge that we are building on a strong foundation. I contend that all our local museums are, in a sense, national museums. They tell the small stories; the stories of the people, great and small, who all play their part in the history of our nation. They tell the big stories of movements of people, of great men and women, and of technological change through the ages. My message today is a strong and clear one: support our local museums.

2.59 pm

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. While thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for securing this debate, I should point out that, unlike him, I am not yet an exhibit in a museum.

As the Member of Parliament for the birthplace of Scotland’s favourite son, Robert Burns, I am acutely aware of the benefits that local museums can bring to a community. There are many museums that contribute to the cultural, social and economic life of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock. I will name but a few, such as the Rozelle museum and gallery in Alloway in Ayr. The McKechnie Institute in Girvan is very important to that community. It was bequeathed by the McKechnie brothers, who were traders who sailed or smuggled their goods to and from Girvan harbour—but they did leave the town that institute and museum. The town hall in Maybole reflects the rich industry of that town over recent years, and includes the former town bell. Perhaps Opposition Members might be tempted to make a pilgrimage to the Baird Institute in Cumnock, which delightfully plays host to a room dedicated to Keir Hardie, founder of the Labour party, first Labour politician and first leader of the Labour party. They are welcome to come along—it is well worth a visit. We are proud of it, and I give credit to East Ayrshire Council for hosting it.

I should also mention His Royal Highness Prince Charles, who secured Dumfries House for the nation. It is adjacent to Cumnock and is a wonderful asset for the Ayrshire community, for Scotland and the UK. South of Ayr, on the coast towards Girvan, Culzean Castle still has what are termed the Eisenhower rooms, where President Eisenhower was hosted after the second world war.

One of our biggest attractions must be the award-winning Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway. I pay tribute to the National Trust for Scotland, which made a hefty investment in that. It includes Burns Cottage, where the bard was born, as well as Alloway Auld Kirk. In the tale of “Tam o’ Shanter”, Tam, wearing his blue bonnet and on “his gray mare, Meg” made an approach to that church, under the guise of thunder and lightning and darkness, where he found auld Nick having a party with the witches, who in turn gave chase to Tam and

his mare. Meg was aiming for the “key-stane o’ the brig” at the Brig o’Doon, to cross the river where the witches would not cross. The nearest the witches got was Meg’s tail and, sadly, Meg forever lost her tail. That was the tail of Meg and the tale of Tam o’ Shanter.

The monument and the gardens are there. It is a perfect destination for anyone who wants to learn more about Scotland’s national poet, who is famous throughout the world. Since the new museum was opened to the public in December 2010, it has drawn approximately 300,000 visitors per annum. They come from all over the world—America, Canada, Russia, Europe, wherever. They come to Alloway, contribute to the local economy, perhaps staying in the local area and seeing more of the wonderful sights that Ayrshire has to offer. In addition to those employed at the museum, it also supports jobs in local businesses, especially in the tourism and hospitality sector, which is very important to Scotland and the UK.

Museums, quite simply, are worth it, even on a purely economic level, but they are much more than just economic enterprises—they are there to educate, entertain and inform. Like the many other local museums in South Carrick, the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum helps everyone who walks through its doors to learn more about Ayrshire and one of its most famous sons.

If my colleague, the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), were here, I am sure he would agree that Ayrshire should also promote the good work of Sir Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin. The world is indebted to him for that discovery, but we do not mark that as much as we should. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would support me in taking that forward—perhaps in a pop-up museum that could be mobile and go roundabout. That is something worth pursuing. We need to promote Sir Alexander Fleming and the good work he did for not just the UK but the world.

People who come from far and wide to visit a local museum learn about the local area’s history, culture and people. They return home with a knowledge about that area that they can share with friends and family.

**Michelle Donelan:** Does my hon. Friend agree that strong relationships between Wiltshire museums and exhibition places, such as Corsham Pound and Chippenham Museum, enable our young people to learn about our history? They are our future, after all.

**Bill Grant:** I entirely agree. Our heritage and our past are the foundations of our future and young people should know the journey of their community for that future.

Visitors returning home help to put an area on the map, and that in turn attracts more people to the museum and the area in general. Museums build the cultural profile of an area and contribute to bringing in more tourists and boosting the local economy. They also help local people, as my hon. Friend said, learn more about their own heritage, encouraging community cohesion and a strong sense of civic pride, which we must retain and build on. People who know their community’s history and culture very often take pride in it and tend to care and contribute to their community. It is important that we have local museums that can pass on that local knowledge to the next generation, and it is therefore also important that local museums engage with local schools and community groups to facilitate that.

In Ayrshire we are blessed with the home of Burns and so many other cultural assets, but every part of the United Kingdom has its own story to tell, and its own local museums to tell them. Those museums are a great cultural, social and economic good, and we should not be afraid to support them.

An issue facing the majority of UK towns is the demise of our town centres as the retail landscape changes throughout the UK and Europe. We need to think seriously about taking heritage museums into town centres to add another dimension to helping to secure their future. Perhaps the dispersal of lottery funds could come in to secure the vibrancy of town centres—that was mentioned earlier.

Museums and heritage centres are often soft targets for budget cuts by councils or other public bodies. That temptation should and must be resisted as closure may prove to be folly in the long term.

I close by thanking every single person, young and old—even those as old as me—who volunteer their time and services to small local and larger museums. They are the mainstay supporting the existence of such facilities in our communities. They are so important. Our past is the foundation of our future and we should secure it as best we can.

3.7 pm

**Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab):** I did not expect to speak in this debate but am happy to do so, given the enthusiasm of Members on the Government Benches for local museum services. In Hartlepool, our museum, which is now part of the National Museum of the Royal Navy in the North of England, is part of the town centre; the ship that forms part of it, HMS Trincomalee, stands proud in the middle of our town centre. There is also a Scottish connection with Robert the Bruce, who used to own half of Hartlepool. Many of our wards are named after him—De Bruce ward, for example.

I originate from Rochdale, where the co-operative pioneer movement was established, and the museum there is dear to my heart as a co-operator. It was Hartlepool, however, where I have lived for 14 years and where I am very proud to be the MP, that was the first place on British shores in the first world war to be bombarded from the sea. The troops positioned at the battery were Durham Light Infantry, and the recent demise of the DLI Museum in Durham is one of the sad stories to come out of this debate. I am hopeful that the museum will be resurrected as part of development plans within the county. Like my constituents, I am very proud of our regiment’s historic past, and I hope the position on that will be something of a phoenix.

On the situation with outreach, it is very important that museums reach out to communities, and I get that. The other point I would make is about the Cleveland archaeological unit, which is based in Hartlepool and feeds a lot of things into our local museums. It, too, is underfunded and I would like reassurances from the Minister that such associated services are looked at as well when it comes to future funding.

3.9 pm

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I will not take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling

[John Howell]

(Stephen Kerr) about which of us is older and should feature in a museum. I am quite happy to bear his good counsel on this.

In 2014, I produced a report entitled “The Future of Local Government Archaeology Services” along with my colleague from the other place, Lord Redesdale. We are both fellows of the Society of Antiquaries, which stood behind the report, and it was commissioned by the then Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey). It was a comprehensive report that looked at the future of museums, archaeology services and funding. It gathered written and oral evidence from more than 80 contributors—a reputable number—who provided insight, data and suggestions for solutions. I will not go through all of the recommendations that we came up with, although I will feature a couple of them as they relate to what other hon. Members have said. One recommendation that I will mention relates to local museums.

Many of the recommendations reflect the way in which archaeology services are organised on the ground and how people should approach them. The recommendation that relates to museums asks for an urgent rationalisation of the system for retention of material. Many museums received bag after bag of Roman brick from archaeological excavations. There is nothing that you can do with a bag of Roman brick except weigh it, and then you might as well throw it away. There is absolutely no point in keeping that brick—and I say that as an archaeologist myself. The focus on trying to retain all that takes away the focus that the museum should have on the things that it actually wants to keep and show. So we came up with a good recommendation on that.

Overall we found convincing evidence to suggest that a sharing of services on a multi-authority or sub-regional basis can lead to a much greater resilience of services. Such services would be capable of achieving economies of scale, which individual local museums cannot, as well as other benefits in terms of quality of services, greater provision of skills and expertise, and more opportunities to ensure that expertise is passed on and not lost. Local expertise is a particular skill that we ought to value.

For example, the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service builds on the thriving community of local volunteers that it has developed. It provides a forum for them, it facilitates grants for community projects, and it enhances the archaeological and historical work that is undertaken. It also provides skills training for local volunteers and the potential for implementing community reporting mechanisms across the board. Those are incredibly important aspects of the work.

I will turn briefly to retention in archives and the finds that have been produced. Although it would be wrong to say that museums are not selective, at the moment museums have no imperative at all to be selective, which is a great shame. Also, the rules governing the retention of archaeological material were set by the Arts Council, not by central or local government. That situation has produced one thing above all in how museums look at their collections: a responsibility too burdensome for the museums to carry on with.

Sustainability issues affecting the deposition of material in archives is an endemic problem. To become much more sustainable, it is recommended that archives should

adopt much stricter policies on accessions, with clear identification of the material of highest value and what they are going to do with it. That does not gainsay at all the comments made by my colleagues, but we need to put those services on a stable basis and they need to adhere to standards that have sustainable accession policies. We also recommended that English Heritage engage further with the Arts Council and the museum sector to pursue further strategies to provide that.

I sincerely hope that we do not lose our local museums. They play an important part. We should look at their combining certain of their services in order to do things better and not have to do things in an ad hoc way. Above all, we should put them on a sustainable basis for the future.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Wind-ups will begin at half past three.

3.16 pm

**Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con):** I will not take that much time, Mrs Main. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship and a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell).

One of the benefits of turning up to a debate without a prepared speech is that a Member can make it up as they go along, take the sense of the debate and then create a view. I have noticed during this debate that we have not once used the word “Brexit”. As an ardent Brexiteer, I am disappointed. As I listened to the fantastic contributions, I realised that we have not had the “so what?” question. We have lots of museums. They are brilliant and have lots of lovely artefacts for people to come and see, but the “so what?” question is critical.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) suggested that the purpose of museums is to educate and entertain. I do not detract from that at all, but I think their purpose is to inspire. Regardless of whether people voted for remain or leave, they know that this country has an incredible history that should be celebrated. I am an ardent Brexiteer because I have absolute faith in our nation to go forward into the world globally and to dominate. Our history tells us we have done that previously and we can do it again.

The question before us today is that this House has considered museums. I do not think it is possible for us to answer yes to that question unless we have considered the museums of the Black country, particularly a museum in my constituency. If we start small and grow, in my constituency we have the Willenhall Lock Museum, a Victorian building that was constructed in about 1840. There is a house at the front of the premises, and on a good day it is populated by volunteers dressed in traditional clothing and bringing the building to life. They cook traditional food using products that were available at the time. The house is gaslit, so people get a real feel of what life was like, and the volunteers are brilliant at bringing the exhibits to life and giving people a real opportunity to interact.

**Stephanie Peacock:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should pay a huge tribute to the volunteers who keep local museums running, such as the Maurice Dobson Museum and Heritage Centre down the road from

where I live, in Darfield near Barnsley? It is a fantastic local resource, and it is thanks to volunteers that it keeps going.

**Eddie Hughes:** I completely endorse those comments. To a degree, without those volunteers, some of the buildings in question would not be maintained. It is not always a question of money, although of course we need more money. The efforts of such people sustain the buildings and keep educating and inspiring us.

Moving through the museum, the house at the front gives a sense of what life was like, and in the buildings at the back visitors can see where locks were made locally. They were bespoke, clumsy, large products, but the museum gives a sense of why Willenhall was great and why at one time it made most of the locks used in the country. That has led to Guardian Locks in my constituency, a business that has existed since 1982. It is a family-run enterprise and does not do mass manufacture, which means it can offer clients a bespoke service. Sometimes it delivers only one or two locks, but people know it gives excellent service. The product is guaranteed and the family stand completely behind the products they provide.

Assa Abloy is also in my constituency. It was formed in 1994 and, if we believe its website, might be the largest provider globally of intelligent lock systems.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to refer to museums on a regular basis. His comments will then be in order. He is straying somewhat off the topic.

**Eddie Hughes:** I am sorry, Mrs Main. I was coming back to my point of inspiration. It is Willenhall Lock Museum that has inspired Guardian Locks and Assa Abloy to produce high-quality locks on a global scale.

Obviously, it is not only locks that we deal with in the Black country. Walsall, our local football club, is nicknamed the Saddlers because we have a 200-year history of leather crafting in Walsall. At the Leather Museum, visitors can enjoy a tour, see how the products were crafted and, according to the website, make a keyring. People are leather crafters by the time they leave, having enjoyed their visit.

However, the scale of things gets bigger, because of the Black Country Living Museum, which is spread over 26 acres—hard to imagine. That huge site has 50 buildings taken from other parts of the Black country and reconstructed to form a high street as well as various businesses. It is populated partly by volunteers, who show people traditional smithing and crafts that we might have forgotten. The point of those museums is that they inspire. Those who go to the museum have an opportunity to see, in many ways, the reason this country is so great, and the opportunity that we have taken to innovate and lead the world. People young and old get that chance to see why our future has been fantastic in the past, and will be yet again.

It is important, with reference to the Mendoza review, that museums take the opportunity to understand how they should operate in an era of restricted funds. They need to ensure that they bring crowds through the door. Sometimes money has to change hands. At Willenhall Lock Museum, a group of 10 people can have a tour for £75, and for larger groups it is an extra £5 a person.

Check the website—or in fact, Mrs Main, do not check the website: if you visit I shall give you a tour myself. To make their future sustainable, museums need new ways to bring people in and new access to funds, and they need to engage with the public. We have a great future, and our history is represented in the museums I have described. I suggest everyone should come to the Black country.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that kind invitation. My husband is from Birmingham way, and I have been to the Black Country Living Museum, but if I am ever up that way again I will perhaps look him up.

3.24 pm

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Main. It was interesting to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr). He spoke at length about local museums in his constituency, of course, and I particularly liked the mention of the many volunteers, who along with staff, play such a huge part in keeping local museums going. Members on both sides of the House have made many mentions of the local museums in their constituencies. There are almost too many to mention now, but that surely indicates how important a place those museums hold in our hearts.

While I note the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Stirling, I am still reminded of a Mrs Cameron who won an award last year for her campaigning against the cuts to local services that Tory austerity brings. She lives in Oxfordshire somewhere and I believe that her son used to be in politics. That was of course a Tory council implementing the cuts of a Tory Government, driven by the austerity ideology, which would completely drive away such services if it could. I frankly find it a harmful, damaging and cynical ideology, born of a lack of concern for society and supported by a deceitful claim that the Government have no money for fripperies such as museums. A few billion to compensate for the failure of UK policy on the EU can be found down the back of the sofa and billions for nuclear weapons are in the biscuit tin above the fridge, but a few thousand to run local services such as museums appears to the Government to be an outrageous consideration at times.

**Stephen Kerr:** I find it a bit rich for the Scottish National party spokesperson to take that tone in the debate. An SNP council was threatening to close the Smith Museum in Stirling. It is a bit rich for me to sit and listen to a sermon.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Interventions usually pose a question, Mr Kerr, but I am sure the hon. Lady will note and perhaps respond to your remarks.

**Deidre Brock:** I am glad to take the opportunity to mention—and I am sure the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge—the work of Museums Galleries Scotland in providing funding for local museums in Scotland. He will be pleased to see that it is distributing nearly £750,000 in capital grants to small museums in this round of funding, which is one of four in the year, and will, I am sure, want to congratulate our Cabinet Secretary for Finance on finding an extra £200,000 for this round

[*Deidre Brock*]

of funding. He will also be delighted by the range of funds available to museums from Museums Galleries Scotland—particularly, perhaps, the funding for collections in the programme to deliver against the national strategy.

Alistair Darling, in the dog days of the last Labour Government, said he planned spending cuts deeper and more savage than anything Thatcher had done. The response of George Osborne and the current incumbent of No. 11 Downing Street seems to be, “Hold my beer,” with little regard for the cultural carnage that could follow.

The hon. Member for Stirling bemoaned becoming a museum artefact, but he might think upon that and consider it better than the alternative. I grew up in Australia, where the ownership of history is a contentious issue, and the different attitudes often create conflict. I suggest that there is a bit of that in Scotland as well. Those who would remember the whole of Scotland, including its working people, its poor and its dispossessed, do not necessarily sit comfortably with those who would laud royalty and wealth. Similarly, there is little in the way of commemoration of the Gaelic heritage of Scotland. I asked earlier whether the hon. Gentleman would support the repatriation of the Lewis chessmen. I wonder whether he believes that collections held centrally should be sent back where they came from, and whether he supports the repatriation of items such as the Elgin marbles—not to Elgin, before some wag starts up—but back to Greece.

**Bill Grant:** Again, I am old enough to be an exhibit, but does not the hon. Lady agree that the greatest risk to museums and heritage centres in Scotland is the continued and repeated unnecessary cuts to council budgets by the Scottish Government when there is no need to do so, and when they can find £115 million at the drop of a hat to support their equivalent of the DUP, the Green party?

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Interesting though it is to cover the minutiae of politics between the SNP and other parties, I hope we will stick with the subject of the debate, which is museums.

**Deidre Brock:** Indeed. Thank you, Mrs Main. I will take your advice. It would be difficult to do so now, but we shall certainly continue that conversation outside this debate, I have no doubt.

To return to the Elgin marbles, should all those things be sent back where they came from, so that they have cultural and local resonance, as the hon. Member for Stirling suggested about some items in the Scottish national collections? Does he support the repatriation of the “Book of Deer”, for example?

Museums are, in the main, staffed by enthusiastic people who try to ensure that a record of the past is preserved and presented to future generations intact for reinterpretation. I contend, however, that they reckon without political barbarians, and they have not seen the huge amount of brutality coming their way. Under the SNP, local authorities are getting a larger share of the Scottish budget than ever. Tory cuts mean that the overall budget for Scotland is reducing, but the share going to local government is increasing, and across Scotland that investment is paying off.

In Edinburgh, museum opening hours will be extended this year so that more people can visit and more citizens engage, and more revenue will be generated. The Museum of Edinburgh, the Museum of Childhood, the People’s Story Museum, the Writers Museum—all will have extended hours. I also want to mention the fantastic staff who steer those museums and galleries. They manage to work miracles on a small budget, and as convenor for culture and leisure in Edinburgh for five years, one of my greatest pleasures was to have got to know them and to have seen at first hand their ingenuity, dedication, expert knowledge and loving care for the items and buildings in the city’s ownership.

One of my favourite museums—I hope this is allowed a mention—is the Museum of Edinburgh, which is not to be confused with the National Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street, although it often is. The Museum of Edinburgh possesses objects that range from a cabinet made by Deacon Brodie that once rested in the bedroom of the young Robert Louis Stevenson, to signs that swung above shops in Leith in my constituency in the 18th and 19th centuries, and beautiful examples of glass, silver and pottery for which Edinburgh and its surrounds were once renowned. I suggest that Members come to visit Edinburgh’s museums—I might be biased, but I think that Scotland’s capital city performs extremely well in maintaining a range of local museums that tell different aspects of its story.

The story elsewhere is not as rosy as some hon. Members have suggested. A survey of cuts in 2015 found that nearly one in five English regional museums closed one part or branch to the public in that year, and 10% of England’s museums are to introduce entry charges. At the end of last year, the Mendoza review of England’s museums reported a 13% reduction in funding over the past 10 years—an indication, I suggest, that some of England’s politicians are not listening to England’s people.

Finally, the logical consequence of what some would describe as barbarous Tory policies since 2010 is clear: they create a desert and they call it culture. If any Member of the governing party really cared about local museums, they would be lobbying their Chancellor for an immediate end to austerity.

3.32 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on securing today’s debate. His tremendous enthusiasm for local museums shone through, particularly in his references to an antique nipple protector and an internationally renowned mutton bone. Only he could have brought those items to life in such a way during the debate. He also told us something I did not know, even though I used to teach history: that Mary Queen of Scots played football. I knew she had played golf, but not football—in a sense, it is a shame that she is not available for the current Scottish national team, given their recent fortunes.

The hon. Gentleman made an interesting proposal on indemnity, and he referred back to Scottish history at some length. The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) mentioned the lack of references to Scotland’s Gaelic heritage, and a much forgotten aspect of Scottish history that is not mentioned sufficiently is its Welsh heritage. The greatest poem in the Welsh

language, the ancient poem “Y Gododdin” describes a battle between Welsh-speaking warriors from the south of Scotland at Catterick in North Yorkshire with the Anglo-Saxons. Indeed, the hon. Lady’s constituency’s name of Edinburgh derives etymologically from the old Welsh—I thought I would add that into the mix since we are having lengthy discussions on Scottish history. The hon. Member for Stirling also recognised that state funding is important, and I will come back to that point.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) who spoke about the Keir Hardie exhibition, and I will certainly visit that if I get the chance to go to his part of the world in future. He also described the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, which again sounds like a wonderful place to visit. As he rightly said, museums “are worth it”, and I will come back to that later in my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) spoke about the importance of funding local museums, and he described some museums in his constituency. He spoke not just of museums themselves, but also of the associated services, which is an important point. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), our resident archaeologist, spoke about the review he undertook. He said that it is important that we do not lose our local museums, and I could not agree more. He also described some of the ways that he thought those museums could be made more sustainable.

It was all spoiled, however, by the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) who introduced the “B-word” into the debate—we were all getting along so well until that point. He described how he thought that we as a country should “go forward into the world and dominate”—I think those were the words he used—as we have done in the past, although I am not quite sure what he has in mind. He also said that “our future has been fantastic in the past”, which I thought was the quote of the day. He described a wonderful sounding Black Country Living Museum in his constituency, which again sounds like a marvellous place to visit.

As hon. Members have made clear, local museums are a crucial part of the UK’s cultural life. They tell the story of specific communities up and down the country and help to preserve a continuous sense of community identity. People often feel an ownership of their local museum that they do not always feel about larger civic institutions. As a result, the audience of local museums can often be more diverse and representative than for other larger museums.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the St Fagans National Museum of History in my constituency of Cardiff West. Rather like the Black Country Living Museum, it is on a large site with buildings from all over Wales. It is a wonderful place to visit, and was recently the happy recipient of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. That is helping it to develop facilities, including a new “gweithdy”, as we say in Welsh—a place where people can go and try some of those crafts with those wonderful new facilities. If Members ever visit Cardiff, I suggest that they go to the edge of town and visit that museum.

For the reasons we have heard, local museums sometimes have to charge for entry. Constituency MPs are clearly aware of the benefits that local museums bring, but those museums are facing funding problems and threats

of closure. There are ways we can try to overcome that fact, but we cannot divorce it from the UK Government’s cuts to the budgets of the devolved nations through the Barnett formula, and to local authorities. The Local Government Association states that there have been staggering cuts since 2010, and that central Government funding will be reduced by a further 54% by 2020. In that context, it is no surprise that local authorities struggle to maintain their services, particularly non-statutory services such as museums.

The Mendoza report, commissioned by the Department, identified museums that are run and supported by their local authority as those most vulnerable to funding pressures. Last week, on the same day the Government published museum visitor numbers, the Museum Taskforce published its report, which considered the funding of museums in England. It stated:

“Often it is less prosperous areas that are feeling the brunt of the crisis in funding and there is concern that further reductions in public finances will leave local authorities in less wealthy areas in particular, unable to fund non-statutory services such as museums.”

Councils are the biggest public sector investors in culture, including museums and galleries, and despite reductions in council funding from central Government, they valiantly continue to spend more than £1 billion per year on culture. That is a good investment because culture is a very good source of economic regeneration. I encourage local authorities of all stripes to continue to do that.

We need more than fine words about local museums from the Government; we need to put an end to the continuous cuts that are putting them at risk. It seems contradictory to protest the underfunding of local museums while propping up a Government who seem intent on cutting the funding available to local authorities. The hon. Member for Stirling was very fair in his remarks, and I hope Conservative Members put pressure on Ministers to ensure local authority funding is not cut so savagely that they are forced to cut local museums. The Government seem determined to ignore that at the moment, but I hope there will be a change of mind under the new Minister.

The Opposition Front-Bench team thought we would look into the issue ourselves when we were recently trying to get to the bottom of what is happening to our local museums, and we conducted a bit of research into the opening hours of local authority museums in England through hundreds of freedom of information requests. We gathered information from a sample of 250 local museums, which showed a huge decline in museum opening hours in the past seven years. Since 2010, more than 40% of local authority museums have decreased their opening hours by an average of 30%. Just across our sample, that is a loss of almost 23,500 opening hours since 2010.

Those results confirm that museums are bearing the brunt of the Government’s local authority cuts. At the end of the day, it should not be up to the Opposition, who have fewer resources, to collect such statistics via freedom of information requests. The Government should be doing that work themselves so they better understand the sectors they represent.

Our museums have to contend not only with the reduction in local authority funding, but with the reduced funding from the lottery and the potential loss of EU funding—the “B” word is not going to issue from my lips. Late last year, the Heritage Lottery Fund announced

[Kevin Brennan]

that it will distribute only £190 million in the coming financial year, down from £406 million in 2016-17. In addition, no new major grants will be awarded during this transitional year. The Government published their heritage statement only a few days after that announcement, and the document did not even mention the possible implications of that reduction in funds for museums and the wider heritage sector.

The Arts Council's recent report on the EU funding that arts and cultural organisations in the UK receive shows that museums have received more than £13 million from regional funds alone. Despite that, in response to a written question, the Government failed to outline whether that funding will be preserved when we leave the European Union.

Like the hon. Member for Stirling, I have political differences with the Scottish Government in Holyrood, although probably for different reasons, but it is undeniable that the UK central Government's austerity policies and the effect they have on the devolved nations and councils around the country are at the root of local museums' problems. Budget decisions made in this House have a direct effect on funding and resourcing in devolved policy areas and local authorities. On all three of these issues—local council cuts, lottery funding reductions and EU funding reductions post-Brexit—the Government need to take responsibility and the actions necessary to ensure our proud cultural heritage continues to be available to the widest possible audience.

I do not want to be overwhelmingly negative, because this has been a jovial debate and a lot of exciting and inspiring work is taking place in our museums. As part of my Front-Bench brief, I have had the pleasure of visiting some fabulous museums around the country. I have been to country homes and seaside fishing museums, and later this month I will be travelling up to the north of England to see some exciting work taking place in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), where there is a wonderful award-winning local museum.

We can all be proud of our cultural heritage in the UK. We should all be able to share it and feel that we have ownership of it. However, the Government must not bury their head in the sand. If they continue to do so, I will continue to draw attention to the challenges our museums face and to advocate on their behalf.

3.43 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michael Ellis):** Thank you for your chairmanship, Mrs Main. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for introducing this debate on a subject that is very important to us all. I commend all hon. Members for their valuable contributions. Even greater congratulations are due to my hon. Friend for helping, with his constituents, to save the museum in Stirling.

I was delighted to be appointed Minister for the arts, heritage and tourism earlier this year. It is a great privilege to be the Minister responsible for part of this country's world-leading museums sector. Local authorities will note that cutting culture, museums and galleries is a false economy. The United Kingdom's museums are

highly popular: more than half of the nation's adult population visited a museum in 2016, and three of England's national museums were in the top 10 most visited attractions in the whole world in 2016.

I congratulate hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber for their enthusiasm and affection for their local museums, including the D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum in Ashfield, the wonderful Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Regimental Museum in Stirling and many others. In the past few weeks, I have visited the National Railway Museum in York and seen the wonderful work that the Science Museum Group is doing there. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) mentioned Dumfries House, which is a wonderful example of work that has been done in the national interest and has helped the local community. We are lucky that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has done an enormous amount of work.

Local authorities still spend more than £200 million annually on culture and museums. Her Majesty's Government have maintained cash levels of funding for the museums sector, and we are introducing new sources of funding, such as tax relief for exhibitions. The local government funding settlement is worth more than £200 billion between 2015 and 2020. Locally elected councils decide how to spend money in their area. I reiterate the message that it is a false economy to cut culture. Local authorities have that responsibility.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) mentioned royalty. I believe that Her Majesty's yacht *Britannia* is based in the hon. Lady's constituency. It brings in hundreds of thousands of visitors to her constituency, so she should be very grateful for that royal connection for that and many other reasons.

I am proud that free entry to museums remains Government policy. There is a wide variety and a huge number of museums in the United Kingdom. There are more than 2,000 museums in England alone. The Government provide more than £800 million through grants from the Arts Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and others, which helps museums to protect their collections and keeps them accessible to as many people as possible. The VAT 33A scheme allows eligible museums to claim back VAT that is incurred when putting on free exhibitions, so that is something to bear in mind.

The Heritage Lottery Fund continues to be a major funder of museums under Sir Peter Luff. My Department will work very closely with it to implement the recommendations in the Mendoza review, which several hon. Members mentioned. In 2018, HLF will invest substantial sums—in the region of £190 million—in arts and heritage in the UK. It will also consult on its future priorities, and it will announce new funding in the autumn of this year. That is something to watch out for.

Museums are a vital part of Britain's tourism offer: 40% of visitors to all parts of the UK cite culture as the reason for their visit. Furthermore, the high profile of our museums helps to build international relationships. As we all know, culture is a bridge between nations and peoples, and it helps to promote Britain to the world. It helps to put us top in soft power.

The British Museum, as has been alluded to, is already sending around the country items that are linked to different parts of the country. That helps local museums, as we heard, and at a local level museums can play a

vital role in their communities, telling the story of a place and its people and helping to shape it. They develop and showcase great British talent, from architecture and design to portraiture and ceramics, and world-class curatorial skills.

Museums are vital to our economy. Research by the Arts Council suggests that museums in England alone generate £2.64 billion in income and £1.45 billion in economic output each year—so they make money for the country—and that funding for the arts brings in up to £4 for every £1 invested. Museums are very good value for money.

As for Scotland, cultural policy is, of course, a devolved matter. I may therefore be unable to comment on questions that relate to the specifics of devolved policy, but I assure all Members that I am a keen admirer of Scotland's rich cultural heritage, which is astounding in its breadth and depth. It is important to note that there are also some excellent cross-border partnerships between museums. That happens between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, as well as between Scotland and England, and elsewhere. For example, the recent critically acclaimed exhibition of works by British realist painters at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art brought together more than 80 paintings by some 50 artists, loaned from museums throughout the nation.

I am also really excited about V&A Dundee—recently, by the way, I met the leader of Dundee City Council, who was very impressive—which is due to open in September this year, in a stunning new building on Dundee's waterfront that will provide a venue to share the V&A's collection and exhibitions more widely across the UK; it has an extraordinary collection. The museum will also showcase Scotland's exceptional and creative heritage as its first museum dedicated to design.

Hon. Members have alluded to the Mendoza review of museums in England, which was published a few months ago in November. The review looked at how museums operate today, what the public want from them, and how Government can best support them. It makes a number of recommendations to Government and government agencies, asking us to work closely together to help our museums flourish. I commend Neil Mendoza's review, which is very good.

The review's focus is restricted to the museums sector in England, but many of the themes that emerge from the report are relevant to institutions across the entire country. In the course of the review, Neil Mendoza and his team visited museums the length and breadth of the country. I am pleased to say that he found a thriving sector, supported by more than £800 million of public funding from a variety of sources each year.

There have been challenges for the sector in recent years. It is true that some smaller museums have had to change the way in which they work in order to adapt to reductions in local authority funding. Many museums, however, have successfully adapted to that new climate. I should point out that the review team found numerous examples of museums taking a more commercial approach and thinking imaginatively about how to care for their collections in such a way as to continue to allow as many people as possible to experience them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling and other colleagues asked about the availability of funding, particularly from philanthropic sources, for smaller

museums. Philanthropic giving, alongside public funding and—equally important—commercial revenue generation is a key source of income for museums. The Mendoza review found that museums tend to raise less through philanthropy than do other parts of the cultural sector, such as the visual arts, and that museums outside Greater London appear to be particularly affected. However, there is some evidence that parts of the sector are growing in confidence when asking for and receiving donations from visitors. I encourage that; philanthropic giving is very important, as other parts of the sector know well.

One of the priorities to emerge from the review is adapting to today's funding environment. As my Department works with key agencies and the wider sector to implement the review's recommendations, we expect that larger and national museums will share learning—they have learned a great deal about this—and good practice to support others to access philanthropic sources of funding.

My hon. Friend also raised the issue of loans from the national collections to smaller museums—I have touched on that, as other colleagues did, with the British Museum—and some of the barriers, such as indemnity, insurance, and security, that may occasionally frustrate efforts to lend valuable items to local venues. I cannot comment on the Scottish national museums, but those sponsored by my Department have a strong track record on loans: in 2016-17 the national collection was lent out to more than 1,300 venues throughout the United Kingdom, from long-term loans and partnership galleries to multi-object exhibitions and one-off, so-called “star” or special loans.

Through loans and partnerships the national museums have extensive UK and international reach, but the museums review found that such work could be better joined up. Therefore, my Department will collaborate with the museums and the wider sector on a partnership framework, working to simplify regional programmes and loans, formalise skills and knowledge exchanges, and share best practice in a more consistent and sustained manner. I am pleased to confirm that the partnership framework will also encompass cultural collaboration with museums in the devolved Administrations. In addition, to help to encourage loans, Arts Council England has provided £3.6 million to regional museums to help them to improve their galleries to protect and display borrowed objects through the “Ready to Borrow” scheme, and the Museums Association has published “Smarter Loans”, a helpful good practice guide.

The Government indemnity scheme, which is administered by the Arts Council for museums in England, has been very successful. It is estimated to save museums at least £15 million annually on insurance premiums. As recommended in the Mendoza review, Arts Council England and my Department will continue to work closely together on the Government indemnity scheme, to promote it internationally and to clarify and simplify the process for applying for commercial insurance where required.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling raised further questions about the Scottish treasure trove rules with my Department and the provisions relating to collections of national significance and the museums in his constituency. He will appreciate that I am not responsible for matters that fall within devolved competence, but I

[Michael Ellis]

am sure that officials from the Scottish Government and the Scotland Office will be happy to discuss those points with him in further detail.

I am delighted to have had the opportunity to champion museums in my first debate as arts Minister in this Chamber. The breadth and depth of the contributions to this afternoon's sitting demonstrates just how valuable, treasured and beloved our museums are. I look forward to working with everyone in this important role.

3.58 pm

**Stephen Kerr:** May I say how much I appreciate the response from the Minister? He is quite right; as I pointed out in my remarks, things are different between Scotland and England. I also appreciate the comments of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), and those of other Members who have contributed to the debate.

In summary, the word I take away from the contributions that I have heard this afternoon is “inspiration”—that word was offered to us by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), with whom I share an office—because by enjoying and appreciating our past, we gain confidence for the challenges ahead of us now and for the future.

Someone once said that the best way to celebrate great history is to make more great history. We have to know and appreciate the great history we have in order to be in a position to look forward to making greater history. In that respect, I concur with the importance of museums as a representation of history living in our communities.

I will offer one last plea to my colleagues, and that is to use our museum spaces. Recently I hosted an event attended by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the Smith Museum, which was an excellent and wholly appropriate place to have such a gathering. I invite my colleagues to make use of their museums in future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered local museums.

## Accutane

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

4.30 pm

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the risks of the use of Accutane. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger.

I particularly wish to speak about the impact of Accutane, which can cause depression and impotence when used to treat severe acne. Accutane is but one of a series of drugs, each based on isotretinoin. There are several versions of isotretinoin, known variously as Accutane, Roaccutane, Claravis, Sotret and Amnesteem. These versions of isotretinoin all perform in much the same way. Since all five drugs stem from isotretinoin, and indeed the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency—MHRA—uses that name, I will use it to cover all five of them collectively.

Originally, isotretinoin was marketed as a chemotherapy drug. Based on the evidence of friends who have undergone chemotherapy, I am immediately warned to watch out for side effects. I do not suffer any more from teenage acne or have the urgent need to get it under control that could easily make me overcome misgivings in a bid to get rid of such a curse.

The effects of isotretinoin were last debated on 3 December 2013 in this very place. I took part in that debate because I was concerned to hear about the effects of isotretinoin on the nephew of one of my then constituents. Worries about the effects of isotretinoin had been debated in Parliament some 10 years before that. This seems to be a problem that will not go away and for which we have no scientifically based answer.

I was spurred to call this debate by a constituent who prefers to remain anonymous, but whose son—a totally happy young man—has had his life totally disrupted since taking isotretinoin for severe acne. Having visited a dermatologist at the age of 16, the boy was given isotretinoin and kept taking the drug for eight months before he stopped using it. But its side effects were enduring. Despite having stopped using the drug, the boy—a first-class student who played a sport at a very high level—suffered total erectile dysfunction that continues to this day. He is now in his early twenties and trying to complete a university degree although, unsurprisingly, his hugely embarrassing situation plays havoc with that.

In 2013, I raised this very point in the debate. We were discussing the possibility of isotretinoin having a continuing impact on a patient once they had stopped using it. I suggested that there must be a link, especially as chemotherapy drugs tend to have some pretty unpleasant side-effects. I quote my words from five years ago:

“If the drug is a toxic chemotherapy agent, it may well have a permanent effect on the brain. Consequently, after the person stops taking the drug, it can affect their personality.”—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2013; Vol. 571, c. 249WH.]

Perhaps I should have changed the word “may”.

Everyone present will totally understand what a disaster a sexual dysfunction would be for any young person. Isotretinoin, which was meant to cure my constituent's son of what is normally a teenage affliction, has ruined his life. He has stopped playing sport, become utterly

depressed and is a suicide risk. Imagine how difficult it must have been for him to even discuss such a matter with his mother, which he does no longer. His situation also has huge implications on his having children. Who present here today would not feel for him, or indeed his mother, who is probably denied the huge pleasure that grandchildren bring to any family?

It seems reasonable to assume that the perceived shame and dread about prospects for relationships brought about by sexual dysfunctions must be a factor in reported isotretinoin-inspired suicides. That certainly seems to be true in the case of 24-year-old Jesse Jones from Dorset, whose sad loss was mentioned in the 2013 debate. In a final email to his parents before he committed suicide, he wrote:

“Anything to do with the opposite sex isn’t psychologically appealing. I used to have to try and stop myself from thinking about girls all of the time; now, I could hardly care less.”

Loss of libido was one of the many symptoms that Jesse and his parents blamed directly on the drug isotretinoin.

I have not mentioned the effects of isotretinoin on young women. I gather though, also from anecdotal stories, that it has a similar effect to that of men—a loss of libido. Certainly, it is hugely dangerous if a woman becomes pregnant. It has long been known that isotretinoin is likely to cause birth defects in babies in rather the same way as in victims of thalidomide. I gather, therefore, that medical professionals are very careful about prescribing isotretinoin to young women and that they check carefully that they are not pregnant or will not become pregnant. But pregnancy can sometimes come as a bit of a surprise—then what?

In researching for this debate, I have read many sad stories about those who used isotretinoin. The effects on people’s mood and outlook can be very quick—sometimes within a few weeks. Patients can go from being carefree, outgoing and happy individuals to being utterly depressed, isolated and desperate in a very short time. I read of one case of that time being three weeks from the first use of isotretinoin to suicide. Surely, there is something amiss for some—perhaps not all—who take isotretinoin. Isotretinoin may be a curse disguised as a blessing to a minority of people who suffer severely after ingesting the drug. For those with a sexual dysfunction, the scars will be much deeper than any their acne would have ever caused.

I understand that to date, no direct link between isotretinoin and some of these side effects has been scientifically proven, certainly not in this country. But anecdotal evidence and existing studies point to a need for critical, scientific examination of what so many people have experienced. I accept, too, that for many people the side effects of isotretinoin may not have an obvious impact, but I am told that they do have an impact, albeit we may not see it immediately.

The drug may have disastrous effects for only a small percentage of patients who take it, yet I am assured that since the last debate on this subject in 2013, which I took part in, 33 more deaths attributed to isotretinoin in the United Kingdom have been reported to the MHRA. In 2005, the American Food and Drug Administration posted an alert that patients taking isotretinoin should be watched closely for serious symptoms, including depression, suicidal tendencies, sadness, short tempers, anger, loss of social interaction, psychosis, loss of motivation and changes in appetite. I do not think I ever want to take this wretched pill.

The percentage of people who develop obvious side effects from taking isotretinoin may be small, but it is clear that there may well be huge danger for some of them. As it is prescribed under circumstances where severe acne has failed to respond to other treatments, I presume that the balance of professional opinion continues to accept that it can have a place on the shelves of dispensing chemists—but I wonder whether it should, given the amount of anecdotal evidence about its harmful side effects.

I gather that the Department of Health has agreed that, when a patient is prescribed isotretinoin, the accompanying patient information leaflet—the so-called PIL—should specifically warn about the possibility of erectile dysfunction and diminished libido. Those additional cautions appeared on the Government’s website in October 2017, yet, as I understand it, at least some PILs handed out by medical practitioners have not yet been updated. I hear that, as of last Friday, the pharmacist at one of my local hospitals apparently remained innocently unaware of those changes, too. Perhaps many other pharmacists and even dermatologists are in the dark about those new warnings.

I checked whether I could get hold of isotretinoin pills with relative ease and without a prescription. Of course, I used the internet. I discovered that British companies such as Lloyds Pharmacy insist on a prescription, but that is not so for companies based overseas. The very first company that appeared on my screen—even before any British ones—was called Online Pharmacy, which is based in the United States. Somewhat ironically given the reason I was looking at the website, its strapline was “Safe and High Quality Medicines”. The Online Pharmacy website informed me that I could purchase 10 isotretinoin pills for £45.07. For a further £18.10, I could get them delivered to my home in a “discreet package” by express mail direct from the United States. Incidentally, Online Pharmacy also promised to include two free Viagra tablets, which is even more darkly ironic considering the problems I am talking about.

Last weekend, I asked Delphine, our 21-year-old daughter, whether she had ever heard of isotretinoin for solving problems with acne. With her, I called it Roaccutane, which is the name used in the UK. She replied that she had and that some of her friends had used it. Of course, I immediately warned her to tell them about the potential dangers. If a young person suffering badly from acne hears of a “miracle” pill that they can get over the internet, might they not just do so, ignoring or perhaps just in ignorance of the risks? After all, my daughter knew nothing of the associated dangers.

After three debates in Parliament in which Members have expressed concern about this drug’s impact on patients, surely it is time for a well-funded and sizeable Department of Health study into the possible problems of using isotretinoin so that we know the answer. In the meantime, it might not go amiss to ensure that mandatory warnings are given to and by medical practitioners who prescribe isotretinoin.

4.15 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to respond to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who spoke movingly about the impact of

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

isotretinoin on those who have an adverse reaction to it. He gave me a lot to think about, and I will reflect on the points he made.

It is worth reminding the House of the statement that the Secretary of State made only a couple of weeks ago about the review of medical products and devices, which comes on the back of similar concerns having been raised about other drugs and whether patients are properly advised of the potential side effects of those treatments. He announced that that review would look at three particular products, but also at whether we need to learn wider lessons.

My hon. Friend gave a good example of why we perhaps need to reflect on whether we think sufficiently about how we advise patients to best look after themselves. Our licensing and regulation process for medicines is very scientific and very much based on the product, but, as he explained, the impact of adverse reactions is on human beings. We need to ensure that we deal with these things in the most humane way, because there are real human impacts, which he powerfully outlined.

I welcome this opportunity to amplify the points that my hon. Friend made by providing an update on the risks associated with the use of isotretinoin and on what else we can do to advise patients of its potential side effects. Isotretinoin is licensed on the basis that it is seen as a highly effective medicine for the treatment of severe and resistant acne. Acne affects around 80% of adolescents at one time or another and can affect adults, too. Acne can have a significant negative impact on the lives of sufferers, and it can be very debilitating and distressing. Many forms of acne respond well to treatment with creams, ointments or antibiotics; isotretinoin is reserved for the most acute and resistant cases.

We estimate that 30,000 patients use isotretinoin each year in the UK. Worldwide, more than 18 million people have used the drug. For most people, a single course of treatment leads to the end of their acne, but, as with all medicines, there is the risk of side effects in some people. It is impossible to predict which individuals will suffer a side effect from a medicine. The most important thing we can do is to ensure that, when patients are prescribed a drug, they are fully aware of the risks associated with it so that they can make an informed choice. As my hon. Friend suggested, we are often talking about teenagers, whose stage of development means they are not best placed to make such an informed choice, so we also need to ensure that doctors and prescribers can have sensible and mature conversations with their patients and that we make all the information readily available.

It is worth saying that the risks and benefits of isotretinoin were carefully considered at the time of licensing. Because of the serious side effects associated with the drug, as outlined by my hon. Friend, it is licensed only for use in the most severe forms of acne that do not respond to other treatments. However, as he said, people can find it easy to track down medicines via the internet. Therefore, while we can put in place procedures to ensure that prescribers give the right advice, the opportunities to track down drugs via the internet remain, where such protections are not available. We therefore need to think about what to do through education. While our licensing system is a scientific

process that is respected around the world, we need to consider properly whether we are doing enough to inform patients about how they should consider risk.

In Britain, isotretinoin can be given only under supervision of a consultant dermatologist, and it is generally dispensed via hospitals—however, my hon. Friend found it easy to identify a supplier. We need to ensure that prescribing decisions are made by healthcare professionals who have the most experience. We need to get the message out that, when it comes to these drugs, people need to take the advice of those properly qualified to give it. That does not include Mr Google.

My hon. Friend talked about the information leaflet for patients, which is included in all licensed medicines packs. That is an essential tool, but we need to ensure that people do read it. He mentioned that some supplies do not contain the most up-to-date guidance. That is because supplies are being worked through—all new stocks contain the up-to-date leaflet. We will, however, ensure that the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency continues to communicate that best advice to address some of those issues.

We really need to think more carefully about how we can ensure that patients are owning their treatment and properly assess whether they are considering the risks associated with using a particular medicine. I want to start a debate about the principle of informed consent. I am sure that, in the cases my hon. Friend outlined, had the risks of potential depression been properly communicated there might have been a very different outcome. They may have chosen to use the products anyway, but what is important is that patients make an informed choice, in full knowledge of potential side effects.

The MHRA continues to review side effects. The review of medicines safety is an ongoing process, which recognises that clinical trials will not always pick up every single side effect. The most common known side effect of taking this drug is dryness of the skin. That condition can be severe, chronic and debilitating in some patients, and that can exacerbate the depression that my hon. Friend alluded to.

My hon. Friend also referred to the risk of suicidal behaviour. We can debate whether there is a causal association, but it cannot be ruled out. It is complicated by the fact that young people with acne have an increased risk of depression before the additional effects of that treatment. We will continue to keep those side effects under review and disseminate the best possible information.

The national confidential inquiry into suicide and homicide by people with mental illness highlighted that health conditions were a theme, and within that acne was an evident theme in suicide. When someone—often people with conditions such as acne—has been diagnosed with depression, we expect the NHS to follow guidelines on the management of that depression, which include reviewing how they are interacting with any medicine they are prescribed. Again, we must ensure that that work is undertaken properly.

Isotretinoin is a highly effective medicine that has changed many lives for the better. However, as with any effective medicine, the benefit must be balanced against the risks, and decisions about prescribing and taking medicines need to be supported by clear and comprehensible information. Few here will not have known someone

who has suffered physically or mentally with the scars of acne, but few, too, would doubt the serious nature of the potential side effects of this powerful medicine.

I should refer to the point my hon. Friend made about a possible association with male sexual dysfunction. Many reports have come to light through the UK yellow card scheme and similar reporting schemes worldwide. In the latest review, conducted just last year, there was sufficient cumulative data to add warnings to patient information about the possibility of experiencing lower libido, or problems getting or maintaining an erection.

The MHRA communicated information about those possible side effects to healthcare professionals in the UK in its drug safety update bulletin in October last year. It is therefore making efforts to raise awareness of the issue and support discussions with patients regarding their treatment. The issue is being closely monitored in order to gain more information about possible side effects and to try to establish whether there are any trends or particular at-risk patients. Although some patients recover after treatment is stopped, for others, as my hon. Friend outlined, the side effects have continued after treatment was completed. It is not clear from the available evidence how the medicine may be causing that problem, but the MHRA will continue to gather intelligence.

My hon. Friend also referred to the risk to unborn babies in the event that women get pregnant. Women taking this drug generally need to have a pregnancy test every month and use effective contraception throughout their course of treatment. That illustrates the awareness of risk management in that context, but we need to consider whether we need to do more to ensure that male users are properly informed of the risks.

I repeat that I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing this issue to my attention. I am concerned about the whole issue of informed consent of patients. The conversations that happen when drugs are prescribed are based on an asymmetry of knowledge and information. Perhaps in deference to medical expertise, we do not always ask the right questions when we are offered a treatment. Perhaps in deference to professionals' expertise, we take it as given and trust that we are being given something that will make us better. However, we all know that, whatever drug we take, there is always a risk of side effects. Perhaps we should all, in our own way, use our voice to encourage patients to think widely about risk.

Let us be frank: there is risk in taking an aspirin or a paracetamol, and more sophisticated drugs carry even more risks. We would all be better at looking after our own health if we were prepared to have two-way conversations with medical professionals when we ask for their help so that we do not end up with the upsetting stories my hon. Friend shared with us today. I thank him for bringing the issue to my attention, and I will reflect on his comments.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Hospitality Sector: Tipping

4.29 pm

**Darren Jones** (Bristol North West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the regulation of tipping practices in the hospitality sector.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger.

A few months ago, a local newspaper in Bristol, the *Bristol Post*, exposed a tipping practice at a local chain of restaurants called Aqua Italia that involved managers levying a 3% charge on all table orders regardless of tips received. In practice, that meant that waiters and waitresses could, on occasion, be asked to go to the cashpoint after their shift to withdraw their own money to pay the levy to their employers, even if they did not have any tips themselves. Those funds were then recycled to help pay the wage bill—in essence, charging workers to work.

Amazingly, I am told that that is apparently legal—that is, if, in a reference period, such as a weekly pay period, the average hourly wage after deductions does not fall below the national minimum wage, it is legal, but if it does fall below the national minimum wage, it is not. That is because there are no useful laws on the regulation of tips in the hospitality sector or, as in the case of Aqua Italia, on charging workers to work. Enforcement can happen only if it is related to the national minimum wage. That seems an enormous loophole that should be closed, because this is an issue not only at Aqua Italia. As the BBC “Inside Out West” investigatory team found in its documentary, it has been happening at other restaurants too, including the national chain Turtle Bay, which has a restaurant in Bristol.

The offensive practice of charging workers to work and the exploitation of low-paid hospitality workers through an abuse of power in the use of tips is not new news. In 2015, it became clear that Turtle Bay—again—as well as Jamie’s Italian, Wahaca, Gaucho and Las Iguanas were taking the same approach with their staff, yet while many of them changed their policy in the face of public pressure at that time, to my knowledge Turtle Bay chose not to. The *Bristol Post* reports that Turtle Bay has franchised this policy to other restaurants it is involved with, such as Aqua Italia. The fact of the matter is that laws need to be in place, because even in the face of public pressure some restaurant owners decided to ignore it and carry on regardless.

Following those issues, the Cameron Government undertook a consultation on how to reform the regulations surrounding the use of tips in the hospitality sector. Three years on, to my knowledge, nothing has happened with that consultation or its output, even though hon. Friends such as my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) have tabled amendments and had meetings with previous Ministers on the issue. The consultation sought to do two things: make it clear to customers what happens to the tips they give and ensure that staff get a fair share of those tips.

Some restaurants charge an administration fee on tips to cover the costs of the card transaction when someone tips with a card payment instead of cash. That sounds perfectly reasonable, but the administration fee can sometimes be as high as 16%, when the real cost of the transaction to the card payment company is somewhere

[Darren Jones]

between 0.2% and 0.9%. For workers who earn, on average, £7.71 an hour, that is again entirely unacceptable and an imbalance of power, given that waiting staff have no power to change it.

The question must be what Government should do about that. In my view, it is quite simple: the law should make it clear that workers get to keep 100% of their tips, and in circumstances where there are card payments to facilitate that tipping, the at-cost use of that machine could rightly be passed on, but at the cost the restaurant is charged, not at a higher cost so that the restaurant takes a further share of those waiters' tips.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): On that point, the percentage that appears on a bill in a restaurant is sometimes classified as a tip, not an administrative charge. I am not aware that that is regularly passed on to the staff who carry out the service. Does my hon. Friend agree that there needs to be greater clarity to ensure that the staff get the amount that is warranted for the service they provide?

**Darren Jones:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Going to the heart of the original consultation on this matter, there are two edges to that sword. One is that workers need to be getting the tips that customers feel are being given as tips, but the other is that customers need to understand what is happening with those tips. Often, when we pay bills in restaurants, that is in very small fine print and there is different use of language about administration charges and service charges. Some people do not know whether they are discretionary, and ultimately they do not know whether the tips go through to the staff who have provided them with an excellent service and whom they wish to tip. I hope the Government's response today will pick up on some of those points from the consultation, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister on that point.

As with everything else, technology is changing the situation. One of my constituents in Bristol North West was recently in touch; she has started a company called Tip Tap, a mobile phone app that will allow diners to give their tips directly to the waiter. They can pay the bill to the restaurant, the waiter will get out their app and then they can pay the tip to the waiter directly. That seems an example of a good solution, but I still do not quite understand why restaurant owners and others feel it is a particular hassle to facilitate that process for their workers, who are often the lowest-paid in those businesses—as I say, on average, they earn only around £7.71 an hour.

This is a simplistic debate; I think waiters and waitresses should get 100% of their tips. If the Government disagree with me on that approach, I would welcome a commitment at the very least to revive the consultation from the ashes of the previous Parliament, respond to the submissions to that consultation and set out how they would seek to achieve those two objectives—customers to know where their tips are going and waiters and waitresses to get a fair share of those tips.

I hope that in seeking to achieve simplicity in regulation, processes, policies, technical solutions and billing systems, we could quickly move to the position that says, "But for passed-through at-cost administration charges, waiting staff get 100% of their tips." That seems to me a simple

solution that would close this legal loophole, where no laws exist today, so restaurateurs can get away with it by relying on national minimum wage law. It would stop the exploitation of low-paid workers in Bristol and right across the country. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

**Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair):** Before we proceed, I remind hon. Members that in a one-hour debate the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen each have five minutes and the Minister has 10 minutes. Therefore, I shall call the winding-up speeches as close as I can get to 10 minutes past 5.

4.36 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) on securing the debate.

The hospitality sector has traditionally employed significant numbers of young people who, it is clear to me, are being taken advantage of by unscrupulous employers who use legal loopholes to maximise their profit at employees' expense. The world of tipping is governed by custom and, as we know from visits abroad, it can differ from country to country. Even here in the UK, there is no definitive guide on when we should tip and how much we should add to the bill. In restaurants, of course, that is pretty straightforward, but what if there is already a service charge added to the bill? What about gastropubs? I do not want to come over like Alan Partridge, but it can be a little bit complicated at times.

There is one constant among all this etiquette, which is that people expect, when they give a tip to the waiter, that the waiter will get the tip exactly as it has been handed over. It should not be used as a way to subsidise employees' pay, which is the situation we are in today. My hon. Friend eloquently set out what has been going on at Aqua Italia. I think that is a situation most customers would probably find objectionable if it were drawn to their attention. It unfairly penalises workers for events that are outside their control. They are effectively at the mercy of the customer, and of course the more the customer spends, the more they need to recover in tips.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for an eloquent speech. Students in my constituency got in touch with me about the practice whereby, when customers leave without paying, their tips and wages are docked for those customers. Surely businesses should be taking that on, not penalising workers who are already low paid?

**Justin Madders:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That practice is common in petrol stations as well, when people drive off without paying. It is not something that should be visited on the employees, some of the lowest-paid people in our country. It is not right or fair that they should be penalised for something that is entirely out of their control. There are other things the employee cannot control: what if the customer has a complaint about the food, which has been prepared by someone else, and does not leave a tip? What if they have had to wait a long time before being seated? They might be in a bad mood anyway and just not feel like giving a tip.

Those are all vagaries that can affect whether a tip is given at all, but they should not be used to undermine the lawfully agreed pay rate, potentially breaching minimum wage regulations. I accept, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West said, that it is quite difficult to reach a calculation and know whether the regulations have been breached, but it is certainly possible.

I have heard it said that some employees can end up paying more to their employer in tips than they actually earn in wages for their shift. Does that not tell us something about how this system is completely out of kilter? Conversely, if they do not receive enough tips, they can have money physically taken from them, possibly taking their pay below the minimum wage—albeit maybe not across the whole reference period, but certainly for that particular day—which could leave them out of pocket altogether.

There are other challenges like that, in the hospitality sector in particular. The practice of cancelling shifts at short notice can also lead to people being out of pocket. What kind of country do we live in if somebody can pay for their childcare and their transport to work, only to get to work to be told that they are not needed and can go straight back home again? That is not acceptable.

The blunt truth is that this and many other arrangements in some areas of the hospitality industry are just a scam. They are a device to increase profits at the expense of workers. That is part of a wider problem in that this sector and others seem to treat workers, especially young people, as a disposable commodity. This industry has always involved a fair amount of casual work, but there are companies out there that seem to predicate their business model on exploiting their staff. I believe this is part of a wider trend, which has crept into our economy over the last few years, that work is now insecure and exploitative, and it is not the cornerstone it once was to enable people to build their lives.

That culture has led to an explosion of zero-hours contracts: it says that anybody wanting to become a nurse has to pay £9,000 a year for the privilege of working on the ward and allows an employer to pay less than the minimum wage by calling a job an apprenticeship. It is a culture in which the only way to get into some roles is to take an unpaid internship, which can last for months and have no guarantee of a job at the end. It is a culture that classes more and more jobs as self-employed, thereby avoiding a range of employment rights. It is a culture in which mass redundancies are met with a shrug by those with the power to do something about it.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is eloquently explaining some of the ways in which risk is being transferred from the most powerful in the equation to the least powerful. Does he agree that those are all specific examples of how big employers—and sometimes, unfortunately, small employers—can use all sorts of different methods to transfer the risk away from themselves while keeping the rewards?

**Justin Madders:** A whole industry has built up over recent years that involves the chipping away of what were once long-established principles in this country—part of the social contract of our society. It is prevalent in sectors in which collective bargaining is not prevalent, so I say to anyone in this industry or any other to join a trade union, because unions are their best chance of getting protection in the workplace.

We need to end the destructive combination of weak employment rights, greedy bosses and a complicit Government who are leading us in a race to the bottom—a race that will leave us all the poorer. If reports that up to half of all jobs will be lost to automation in the next decade are correct, we need a complete change in the way the Government view work.

We will have to undertake a massive, state-sponsored exercise to reskill our workforce and to develop a culture in this country that says education and redeployment will run through people's lives. Three, four or five career changes will be the norm; at the moment, we see three, four or five job changes each year. There is no permanence. The state and employers should invest in individuals throughout their adult lives, reward effort with stability and let people have the confidence that they are getting a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

There are many other ways an employer can take money out of their employees' pockets or get them to work for free: uniform costs, cutting breaks or even stopping pay when the restaurant or bar shuts and expecting staff to work an extra hour or two to clean the establishment. Those are all different ruses and different ways of exploiting people. Expectations are so low, especially among the young, that people do not expect to be treated any better. It is time we offered a better vision and a bit of hope, so that people do not see this way of working as inevitable. I believe we can do better.

4.44 pm

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) for introducing the debate.

This issue first came to my attention when I attained my seat in the House in 2015. I was shocked to dine at one of the restaurants here and to find, when asking the staff whether they would receive my tip, that because I was paying that tip on a card, it would go straight to management. Following a write-up of that in the *Evening Standard*, there has been an improvement in practice. However, I understand from an update that I received from a waiter in the Palace that tips are now evenly distributed, but not until two months after the meal. Despite promises and commitments made by the House, some improvement seems to be required. I wonder whether the debate could be shared more widely than just in Westminster Hall.

Partly as a result of that furore, the then Business Secretary, who is now Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, eventually set up a review of the issue. I was disappointed to read that we still await a proper Government response, despite the Minister then responsible replying to a parliamentary question in December 2017 that they would get around to it at some time. Is that not the case with just about everything we deal with, unless it starts with B, ends with T and has an X in the middle? We do not seem to get responses on much, which is a problem for people in the workplace who are desperate for fairness and to see a change in the situation.

The national minimum wage is now £7.71 an hour, but a cleaner in a local authority, for example, might get the London living wage of £10.20 an hour. That is a

[Catherine West]

big difference. A lot of staff who wait on tables are really getting the rough end of the stick. We know from *The Observer* that, in one week, a restaurant called Las Iguanas took £34,000 from its servers across all its branches from a sales charge on servers. If that represents a typical week, over a year that would amount to £1.8 million. That was from a 3% sales charge, or 5.5% in London, which no longer exists at Las Iguanas. That shows that things can be changed and improved. It is often through these debates and coverage in newspapers and so on that we can advise the consumer on best practice. However, I understand that the 3% charge still applies at Turtle Bay, while a 2.3% charge still applies, as far as we know, at Gauchó.

There is a lot more to be done. I look forward to an energetic response from the Minister. I ask him please not to tell us that he is going to postpone the response to that review because we are too busy speaking about B, X and T. Could we please have a speedy response to the review, with energy injected into it? We look forward to his response.

4.48 pm

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) on securing the debate.

The hon. Gentleman clearly highlighted a lack of basic protection in the workplace for those in the hospitality sector. Certainly, the only individuals providing that basic protection are in the trade union movement or organisations such as Better Than Zero, which operates in Scotland and is organised by the Scottish Trades Union Congress youth committee. It stands up against harassment in the workplace—there have been many complaints about workplace harassment in the hospitality sector—unpaid work trials and last-minute shift changes, and it exposes poor employment practices. Tipping practices in the hospitality sector are among those poor practices.

However, I have a wider concern: national minimum wage compliance, and those in the hospitality sector who try to use tips towards paying the national minimum wage rather than, as should be the case, tips being received over and above the national minimum wage. But what chance do workers have when the latest available figures show that 25% of the posts in the national minimum wage compliance unit are lying vacant? There are 399 members of staff in the unit and 83 vacancies, so although according to the National Audit Office 208,000 workers are being underpaid—not paid the statutory minimum wage—25% of the posts in the compliance unit lie vacant.

**Catherine West:** Has the hon. Gentleman made an estimate of the amount of taxation that is missing as a result of the failure to check on who is being paid the adequate amount and therefore the amount that is missing from the Exchequer?

**Chris Stephens:** I have not, but it seems to me that if 208,000 workers are not being paid the national minimum wage and 56,000 workers are in accruals, who have been owed the national minimum wage, and if we compare those figures with the 4,504 full-time equivalents chasing

Department for Work and Pensions social security fraud, we see that more resources should be put into ensuring that the national minimum wage is complied with. I think that the Minister is anxious to intervene.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths):** Let me enlighten the hon. Gentleman. The Government have actually doubled the amount of money that we are putting into enforcement of the national minimum wage. We have increased that to £25 million, and in the last 12 months we have helped to secure £1.2 million of wages owed to people who had been unfairly treated by their employers.

**Chris Stephens:** I thank the Minister for that clarification. However, the facts speak for themselves. Written answers from the Government only a few months ago have told me that the national minimum wage compliance unit has no plans to fill the current vacant posts. I am happy to provide the House of Commons Library with that answer.

The Minister says that there has been increased investment, but the 208,000 workers who are still waiting to be paid the national minimum wage may have a different view, so let me ask him what representations he is making to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to enforce the national minimum wage appropriately in the hospitality sector and what representations he is making to ensure that HMRC is fully staffed and equipped for enforcement of the national minimum wage in that sector. The Low Pay Commission estimates that 1.9 million workers in the UK are currently on or just above national minimum wage rates. That figure is expected to increase, by the year 2020, to 3.4 million workers earning the national minimum wage or just above it, so we need strong action from the Government to enforce the national minimum wage.

On the issue of tipping and gratuities itself, as the hon. Members for Bristol North West and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) have outlined, the Government need to get a grip on what credit card payments mean for the workforce—what that means for the worker in practice needs to be made clear to consumers and others. In my view, it is certainly a breach of consumer protection regulations if consumers are being told that tips from credit card payments are going to staff when they are not. I think that the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green has identified such a practice, and I hope that it will be brought to the attention of the House of Commons Commission. It concerns me; I think that if there are facilities in this place where that is happening, hon. Members have a duty and responsibility to ensure that the House of Commons Commission is aware of those allegations and they are fully investigated.

Will the Minister advise us of the steps that he is taking to tighten the regulations in relation to customer credit card payments? I ask because it seems to me that that is a device to ensure that money is not going into workers' pockets and that the so-called tips are actually an admin fee, as the hon. Member for Bristol North West outlined.

**Thangam Debonnaire:** The hon. Gentleman is making a very clear case. Does he agree that this issue is particularly pressing and urgent, given that nowadays so many people and, in particular, young people do not carry cash?

If they are simply using chip and PIN or contactless, which an awful lot of people do, there is no alternative—and people do want to tip someone who has given good service.

**Chris Stephens:** I absolutely agree. As technology moves on in relation to payment methods, it is a matter of urgency that these practices are addressed and real action is taken. This can be interpreted not just as a consumer protection issue, but as an issue for the workers. The employer is in breach of the Employment Rights Act 1996 if there is evidence of tips not going to them.

I thank the hon. Member for Bristol North West for securing the debate. He gave some shocking examples of events in the city of Bristol. I fear that the practice is operating not only in the city of Bristol but elsewhere in the UK, because we have a Government who like to deregulate things.

Finally, can the Minister tell us what the outcomes were of the long consultation? I think that the hon. Member for Bristol North West said that it was three years ago. It seems to be buried somewhere. Can we see what the outcomes of that consultation were?

4.46 pm

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): I declare an interest as a member of Unite the union.

The practices at Bristol-based Aqua Italia, which have been so methodically exposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones)—I thank him very much for raising this important issue with the Government—and, of course, the *Bristol Post* are, sadly, part of a much bigger picture of exploitation in our low-pay economy. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) outlined so eloquently the multitude of issues in the hospitality sector.

When I was a waitress and then when I worked in a pub, it was quite a regular practice for tips to be used to balance the till if it was under what it should have been at the end of the night. The worker would feel like a culprit because their tips were being used; they would feel that they were somehow being accused of defrauding their employer out of that money. But with thousands of transactions, there will be mistakes, and of course it was clearly very unfair to ask the workers to provide the money out of their hard-earned tips.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend shares a very typical anecdote about something that many low-paid workers will experience; I speak as one whose first job was as a waiter in a well known Glasgow pizzeria. The typical practice was to be paid a pound under the minimum wage and then to have a tip allocated as a wage per hour to bring the person up to the minimum wage, so patrons of the restaurant were unknowingly contributing to subsidising the basic wage of the staff. I would often tell them that by giving us a tip, they were simply subsidising the employer to pay the wages. This practice is absolutely disgraceful, and that is why the work of people such as Better Than Zero is critical to addressing the massive inequalities that we see in employment.

**Laura Pidcock:** That is absolutely right. My hon. Friend gives a terrible but, I am sure, quite common example of what is happening in the hospitality sector. I implore everyone in that sector—and in all sectors,

of course—to join a trade union, because only through a trade union can they have greater workplace rights. Also, consumers will become more aware and ask questions about what is happening to the tips when they are in an establishment.

What happened at Aqua Italia has been very well set out. Most striking was the case of the woman who had to go to a cashpoint at the end of her shift. How draconian is that? What century are we in when somebody has to pay just to be at work? Of course, the mantra of this Government is that for people to get themselves out of poverty, they must be in work. That is clearly a story to the contrary.

It is astonishing that this practice is legal, and it is more commonplace than people imagine. Although it remains within the law to treat people in such an extraordinarily exploitative way, it certainly cannot be said to be moral. The problem in the hospitality sector was and is the chronic lack of regulation, which has meant that exploitation—especially of young people, who perhaps are unaware of their rights and of the benefits of being in a trade union—has been allowed to flourish. That shows that we cannot rely simply on self-regulation in that sector.

Trade unions have taken a special interest in the sharp practices used in the hospitality sector since at least 2008. In May 2015, after it emerged that restaurants such as Pizza Express, Bill's and Strada were taking tips and service charge payments intended for staff, Unite the union launched a summer campaign against these practices. For example, Pizza Express claimed an 8% so-called “admin fee” from any tips paid on a card. That is a huge problem, which has been repeated. There was public outcry as the endemic nature of the problem was displayed and publicised via social media. The huge public reaction forced the Government to act. They launched this call for evidence into tipping practices, followed by this consultation. However, as has been repeated consistently: nearly two years on from the consultation, what action has been taken?

In June, Unite campaigners handed a 6,500-signature petition to the Business Secretary, urging him to release the Government report into tips, but it still has not been published. The petition called on the Business Secretary to give staff 100% of their tips with complete control over how they are shared, to ban the bogus *tronc* schemes and make the code of best practice mandatory. For every single day that goes by, more abuses come to light. The so-called “pay to work” schemes are part of this broader set of practices, which cynically exploit restaurant workers and customers, who are none the wiser.

**Catherine West:** Whereas previously a waiting job was done for a few months or in the summer while someone was a student, these days, with the flat economy we are seeing, people are working in the waiting sector for several years as a full-time role. Does my hon. Friend agree that we now have to get to grips with the situation, get some energy into this and really address the poor practices?

**Laura Pidcock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. For many people this is not a stop-gap, but a career—they will work for many years in a restaurant, bar or pub.

Workers are charged fees, denied service charge payments, robbed of customers' tips and denied tips by these bogus *tronc* schemes. A properly run *tronc* scheme—

[*Laura Pidcock*]

a pooling system, used by employers to distribute non-cash tips for employees—should be genuinely independent, free from employer interference and involve staff, but many are not. Too many say that they get absolutely no say in how the non-cash tips and service charges are shared out, or who gets a share. We have to remind ourselves all the time that it is not the business of the employer to say what happens to those tips. Those tips are hard-earned by the service of that member of staff.

Unite has also uncovered something very important. A number of these bogus tronc schemes, organised through troncmaster consultants—quite a dramatic name—have been used by companies to minimise the basic income of workers in order to avoid liabilities on national insurance and pensions. One case of this was an advert for a sous chef with a salary of £28,000. Once taken on, the employee found out that their contract stated a salary of £16,000, with the remaining £12,000 being paid from service charges. If anybody thinks that these practices are tailing off, I should say that two weeks ago we heard about the scandal at TGI Fridays, the American chain, following the proposal to redistribute card tips from waiters to kitchen staff, in lieu of an increase in wages.

Bogus tronc schemes are among a handful of ways in which tips are taken from the pockets of waiting staff and redistributed upwards and outwards into the pockets of companies, both big and small. Trade unions are rightly pointing out that these schemes verge on remuneration avoidance, illicitly reducing companies' tax liabilities, and therefore should be subject to an investigation by HMRC.

Until staff are given 100% ownership rights over their hard-earned tips, with complete control over how they are shared out, bad employers will continue to take the tips of staff—that has been proved conclusively throughout our history—and young people will continue to live with that insecurity of low pay and not have the regularity of their tips. As the unions have been urging the Government for a decade now, it is time that the Government showed some leadership and dealt with these appalling, exploitative practices that exploit both the customer and the employee. Let us be honest: tips are often a lifeline for staff, but they often become a subsidy for low pay. People are dependent on these tips to live, not just for luxuries.

I am becoming somewhat tired of the Government's inaction, already mentioned by hon. Members, in response to the low-pay economy. We do not need another review, consultation or any further consideration, but we do need a legislative imperative on employers to stop this theft from their staff. Actually, a whole new suite of workers' rights is needed, placing collective bargaining, as has rightly been said, at the heart and centre of that agenda. The Taylor review and the Government response to it did not go far enough at all. In fact, the Government's response to some of these complex issues in the modern labour market was extremely weak. I look forward to the Minister announcing that he will indeed take decisive action on this issue.

5.5 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths):** It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) on his well-made speech. I am genuinely pleased that he has raised these issues in the House and given me an opportunity to consider them and respond to him.

I think this is my seventh week as the Minister for small business, who is responsible for this employment legislation. In that time I have had the Carillion case, the Matthew Taylor report and various other pressing issues, but I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman takes this issue seriously. He raises important points on behalf of his constituents—many of whom, as he rightly points out, are vulnerable—and gives us the opportunity to debate this issue today.

Conservative Members care passionately about the lowest-paid in society, particularly those on the minimum wage and the national living wage, which, as you will know, Sir Roger, was introduced by the previous coalition Government. The Government are committed to creating an economy that works for everyone. The low-paid workers who work hard at our restaurants, bars and hotels across the country should be paid fairly by their employers. There are no excuses for not doing so.

I gently point out to hon. Members, however, that the hospitality industry is a reputable industry that provides fantastic employment opportunities for many of our constituencies across the country. I declare an interest as the previous chairman of the all-party parliamentary beer group. I am a lover of our pubs and hospitality industry. Only yesterday, I spoke at an event, which many hon. Members came to, about apprenticeships in the hospitality industry. They are giving young people careers with great training and great opportunities to earn well and have a fulfilling career in an exciting and dynamic industry. We should not tar all employers who are working hard to build their business and employ people in fulfilling and well-paid jobs with the same brush as disreputable employers.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, but I feel that I must register that I have sat here for almost all of this debate and I have not heard a single person tar the industry with any sort of brush. All Members have done is to be very clear that where egregious employment actions do take place, they need to be rectified. I welcome the hospitality industry in my Bristol West constituency, but I just want employers to pay their workers properly. Most do, but some do not.

**Andrew Griffiths:** I am glad that the hon. Lady and I have found common ground on that point.

The Government are committed to creating an economy that works for everyone. That is why I was extremely concerned to learn from the hon. Member for Bristol North West about the working conditions experienced by some low-paid workers in the hospitality industry. I recall the period of scrutiny that the sector faced in the summer of 2015. Several of our largest restaurants were discovered to be abusing tips earned by their staff. I will clarify for the hon. Gentleman that I recognise the point he makes about the cost of transactions. He will also recognise that income tax is due on payments where the employer acts as the troncmaster—a fabulous word, which I had never heard before I started to prepare for this debate. There is a responsibility on the employer to

deduct PAYE, and we must take into consideration the fact that that will result in some payroll costs. Where the employer facilitates the amounts, national insurance contributions are also due. Clearly, it is important that any employer acting as a troncmaster fulfils their legal obligations in relation to the payment of both income tax and national insurance contributions.

The cases raised today are of exactly the same type as the 2015 cases, which are the reason why we had the consultation. I thank the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) for his contribution, in which he raised important issues including the cancelling of shifts. That is a real problem. People turn up to do an evening's work only to find that if the restaurant or pub is quiet, they are sent home without any further pay by their employer. They expected to do a four or five hour shift, but they may get paid for only one. I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman that, in response to the Matthew Taylor report, we are looking at exactly that: the asymmetry between the flexibility required of workers, particularly those on zero-hours contracts, and the employers that can send employees home at will.

**Laura Pidcock:** Was that a sneaky preview of policy that will be coming from the Government? Are they going to ban zero-hours contracts?

**Andrew Griffiths:** I point out to the hon. Lady that for many people who are employed on them, zero-hours contracts are exactly what they want. I recognise that is not the case for everybody, but all the consultations show that for many people zero-hours contracts provide the flexibility that they are looking for. That is not to say there may not be an argument for some sort of enhancement or bonus for those workers' flexibility. That is why, following Matthew Taylor's report, we asked the Low Pay Commission to look at whether those on zero-hours contracts who have to offer such flexibility should receive an enhancement on their wages as a repayment for it.

**Chris Stephens:** The Minister is, rather suspiciously, discussing much of the content of the Workers (Definition and Rights) Bill, such as shift changes and zero-hours contracts. He has promised me a meeting, but I do not yet have an invitation to see him to discuss these matters. When should I expect to receive an invitation?

**Andrew Griffiths:** I am sure that, as we speak, an invitation is winging its way through the ether to set that up. It is always a delight to talk to the hon. Gentleman, and I am keen to talk to him about his Bill. Perhaps this is the perfect point for me to address some of the issues that he raised in his thoughtful speech, particularly the enforcement of the national minimum wage laws.

The Government have doubled our investment in enforcement of the national minimum wage to £25.3 million a year. That means we have recruited an additional workforce, and around 400 people now work on the enforcement of the national minimum wage. Recruiting additional tax staff takes time, and new vacancies appear. We are committed to continuing the high level of staffing to support those who are being denied the national minimum wage or the national living wage that they are owed. I am delighted to say that last year we assisted

98,000 people in recovering the payments they were owed—up from 58,000 in the previous year—and I am sure the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

**Chris Stephens:** I did say in my contribution that the minimum wage compliance unit hired 399 people. The Minister has just said that it hired 400, so I am glad that one person has been taken on. Seriously, though, does the Minister not share this concern, which many of us have? The National Audit Office says that 208,000 people are not being paid the minimum wage, but if it was not for the investment that he says the Government are making, that number could have been a lot higher—400,000 or 500,000 people.

**Andrew Griffiths:** I absolutely agree. I take that as the hon. Gentleman welcoming the doubling of the investment in the enforcement of the national minimum wage.

I know that everybody is keen to hear my response, but before I go on I will deal with one further point that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston made, which was about unpaid interns. I absolutely agree that people being employed to do work under the auspices of unpaid internships is—let me be very clear—illegal. That is why in the past couple of months HMRC has written to firms that are advertising unpaid internships, reminding them of their obligations. This is no way to avoid paying the national minimum wage. If we find that firms are doing it, they will be prosecuted for non-payment of the national minimum wage.

**Justin Madders:** Does the Minister agree that as Members of Parliament it is up to us to set the standards and not to recruit people on unpaid internships ourselves?

**Andrew Griffiths:** I absolutely agree. That old phrase, "Physician, heal thyself" applies here. We should set the same standards ourselves. I would point out, Sir Roger, that I do not employ an unpaid intern.

The Government are clear that all workers should be paid fairly and at least the relevant national minimum wage. For those aged 25 and over, that is £7.50 per hour. I am pleased to say that the Government will increase that rate above inflation to £7.83 next month, which I am sure all hon. Members will welcome. In all, increases to the minimum wages will benefit more than 2 million workers. That is a well-earned pay rise for them from this Government. I thank all the businesses that have stepped up to the plate and are working hard to pay the national minimum wage. The Government respond robustly to employers that fail to pay their workers correctly. We have doubled our investment in enforcement, as I stated.

A worker aged 25 and above must be paid that £7.50 by their employer. All income earned through tips must be over and above that sum. Let me reassure the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) that any income earned through tips must be over and above the national minimum wage. If any employee is not getting that, their employer is breaking the law. They should report it, and HMRC will take action to ensure that is enforced.

The hon. Member for Bristol North West raised restaurants charging a 3% table levy to their workers. That is a proportion of whatever sales are earned on the

[Andrew Griffiths]

table that worker has served. It should not be seen as a route through the national minimum wage, because it is not.

It is my top priority to ensure that the lowest paid workers are fairly rewarded for their work and contribution to the economy. It simply is not right for employers to keep huge proportions of the tips earned by workers. Accordingly, in the past two years the Government have run a call for evidence, as we have heard, and a public consultation to examine this in greater depth. The exercise established a very clear principle that I think the House will agree with: a majority of stakeholders agree that tips belong to the worker. I would like to make it clear that this Government will act should there be clear, ongoing evidence. This debate has added to that ongoing evidence. The principle is that no employee should be abused in this way.

**Laura Pidcock:** I do not want to disrupt the Minister's progress, but the trade unions have been saying this for a long, long time. It should not take a Westminster Hall debate to legitimise the argument or add to evidence. They have all the evidence the Government need.

**Andrew Griffiths:** As the hon. Lady will know, at the end of last year Unite the union, of which she has said she is a member, worked alongside the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers to produce a new code of practice. That was a joint collaboration, and I pay tribute to both the industry and Unite the union for working in such a proactive way to develop a voluntary code of conduct. I also recognise that a voluntary code of conduct works only if everybody sticks to it. As we have heard, there are still companies that are not sticking to it.

The agreement between the unions and the ALMR about the principles that underpin good tipping practices is clear, and it provides great guidelines for how to distribute tips fairly among all workers, not just those at the front of house. We must remember that those working in the kitchen or cleaning tables are just as much a part of the service experience as those waiting on tables and interacting directly with diners, so I understand the need for the tronc system where tips are spread more widely among staff in some circumstances.

Since 2015, we have seen another change, which is that employers are noticing. Poor employers who misuse tips now face tough scrutiny—not only in Westminster, but under the harsh media spotlight. I am encouraged that newspapers raise the issue on a regular basis and highlight the points made by the hon. Member for Bristol North West.

Hon. Members asked when the Government would formally respond to the consultation on tipping. I have listened to the calls for further action from the Government; many would like to see an outright ban on employers making deductions from tips or levying table charges. It is an extremely serious issue, and the Government reserve the right to take action or to legislate if necessary. The evidence that we have heard clearly indicates that the Government need to look at it very closely and to take action if necessary.

Let me be clear: we are not ruling out legislating to solve the problem. Workers should be treated fairly, and I am clear that it is unfair for employers to pocket a

huge proportion of the tips earned by staff. Furthermore, employers who play fair are disadvantaged compared with unscrupulous employers. It is a competitive market. We have heard the figures for how much unscrupulous restaurateurs and people in the industry can make as a result of that kind of scheme, which provides them with an unfair advantage in the marketplace among their competitors who are doing the right thing. I am very mindful of that, so we will remedy the situation if the industry does not act on the abuses that are sometimes reported.

Naturally, all options for Government action carry costs and benefits. It is important to get it right so any action is targeted and benefits the workers, while burdens on legitimate, well-meaning businesses are minimised. Employers should not be out of pocket, and I entirely accept that they may need to retain a small proportion of tips to cover the administrative cost of processing them, as I said earlier.

There are many examples of good employers who act entirely fairly about their staff's tips and who recognise that treating workers fairly is part of running a productive and happy workplace. Ultimately, it is up to employers to make a compelling offer if they want to attract and retain the best staff.

I thank the hon. Member for Bristol North West for securing the debate and for the collaborative way in which he has raised these issues. I look forward to working with him on them in the weeks to come. It is right to call out abuses of tipping and the exploitation of workers in the hospitality sector, and more widely.

It is the responsibility of all employers to pay their staff fairly, and at least to pay them the national minimum wage. Hon. Members should be clear that if that is not happening, the Government will act if necessary. Our policy is that employers should not make unfair and unreasonable deductions from tips. We reserve the right to introduce further sanctions against employers who fail to comply with that basic principle of fairness.

**Chris Stephens:** On a point of order, Sir Roger. I wanted to wait until the Minister had finished, so I apologise to the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones). Some allegations were made in relation to hospitality establishments in this place. Could you remind us of what action you or other hon. Members can take to raise that with the Commission?

**Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair):** That is not a point of order for the Chair. The Minister has wound up his speech, but I think he indicated during his remarks that he would address that issue.

5.24 pm

**Darren Jones:** I thank my hon. Friends and other hon. Members for their contributions to the debate. With respect, the Minister's winding up speech was much like his Department's consultation: it went on for quite some time but gave no answers. I am disappointed with that because I am a man of definitions, as I said in the main Chamber on Monday: I like answers that give clarity, so that I can pass that on to my constituents. The Minister used language like "If necessary we will act" and "We reserve the right to act", but the comment of his that I will hook on to is the one about looking

forward to working with me in the coming weeks. We have three years of evidence that legislation is required, and I intend to follow up in a matter of weeks to see how we can bring the issue to a conclusion.

As I said in my opening speech, we need clear laws so that workers can keep the tips they have earned and so that we no longer have to use the phrases “pay to work” and “tip tax”, because those practices will be illegal and therefore not relevant in the United Kingdom. The Minister will already have been invited, but I invite him again to join me and others in Committee Room 18 after the debate, where he can hear from workers who have been subjected to this exploitation, from the journalist

who uncovered it, and from unions and representatives of the hospitality sector—who, I should add, agree with us.

I am disappointed by the lack of clarity in the Minister’s reply, but I look forward to more clarity in the coming weeks.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the regulation of tipping practices in the hospitality sector.

5.26 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Wednesday 7 March 2018

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Embedded Technology: Cultural Sector

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock):** I am delighted to announce the publication of “Culture is Digital”. A link to the report can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-is-digital>.

The UK’s future will be at the nexus of our artistic and cultural creativity and our technical brilliance. The UK has a proud history of both cultural and technological excellence: from its world class museums, historic buildings, monuments, theatres and festivals to being a pioneer of computing and its role in the development of artificial intelligence which have changed the world. Today, the UK ranks second globally in terms of the soft power it projects through its cultural offering with cultural organisations and practitioners contributing £27 billion to the economy. Meanwhile the digital sector contributes £117 billion to the economy and remains one of the fastest growing segments of the economy.

Aligning with the aim of the Government’s industrial strategy to build on the UK’s strengths, and capitalise on the opportunities before us, our “Cultural is Digital” report looks to build on the twin UK strengths of creative and technology skills, focusing on the use of digital technology to drive our creative sector’s global status and engage audiences with new creative experiences.

“Culture is Digital” focuses on three themes: how cultural organisations can better use technology and data to serve audiences; improving the digital skills of the sector; and a future strategy section on the need to engage with new technology and for there to be many more collaborations between technology and cultural organisations of all sizes.

The cultural and technology sectors have together come forward with 12 policy commitments within the report to help mainline technology within the cultural sector. This report marks a staging process in the overall goal of embedding technology and digital skills in the cultural sector, and Government will continue to monitor progress and offer support. By delivering on each of the elements of this report, I believe we will cement our position as a world-leading cultural power and thrill even more audiences.

[HCWS519]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Prison Accommodation: Nigeria

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson):** On 9 January 2014, the United Kingdom signed a compulsory prisoner transfer agreement with Nigeria. As part of this agreement, eligible prisoners serving criminal sentences in Nigeria and the UK can be returned to complete their sentences in their respective countries. In support of this, and to help improve the capacity of the Nigerian prison service, the Government

have agreed to build a UN compliant 112 bed wing in Kiri Kiri Prison, Lagos. Tenders have been placed and a supplier identified to conduct the building work, alongside project support and monitoring and evaluation, bringing the total cost to £695,525. This project is funded from the CSSF (conflict, stability and security fund) migration returns fund.

The provision of this assistance is in line with the Government’s security and stability objectives in West Africa. FCO officials carry out regular reviews of our programmes in Nigeria to ensure funding is directed only to approved recipients.

[HCWS518]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Justice and Home Affairs Pre-Council Statement

**The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd):** The EU Justice and Home Affairs Council of Ministers will meet on 8 and 9 March in Brussels. I will represent the UK for interior day.

Interior day (8 March) will begin with a discussion on co-operation between common security and defence policy (CSDP) operations and EU JHA agencies. This work aims to join up the activity of JHA agencies more effectively with EU security and defence missions in third countries. The Government support improving co-operation in this area and I will endorse this work.

This will be followed by an exchange of views on the implementation of the directive on the use of passenger name record (PNR) data. The UK has existing capability for processing PNR data in Europe, was at the forefront of advocating the need for an EU tool in this area, and continues to offer advice and support to member states in the development of their own capabilities.

There will be an exchange of views on co-operation with the western Balkans in the area of internal security and counter-terrorism. Ministers will discuss how to help build capacities in the western Balkans and to facilitate co-operation against threats from organised crime and terrorism, in light of the EU Commission’s western Balkans strategy, published in February. The Government broadly support these high-level counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism objectives and recognise the importance of effective work in these areas in the western Balkans.

Over lunch, Ministers will discuss ways of combating terrorist content online. I will share recent global developments made in preventing terrorist use of the internet. This includes developments within industry, which have been driven by our efforts in the UK and through partnerships including with EU member states and the Commission. I will also note the progress made by the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism and the complementary role it plays with the EU internet forum. I will also update Ministers on the Home Secretary’s recent visit to see the US tech industry in Silicon Valley, where she discussed how to make sure terrorist use of the internet does not simply shift to less well-resourced platforms as the large companies clean up their act.

In the afternoon, Interior Ministers will discuss JHA agencies’ role in counter-terrorism. Discussion will focus on the potential future strategic direction of co-operation, including between JHA agencies; improving engagement with priority third countries; and increasing the number

of CT experts based within the agencies. The Government are broadly supportive of these measures, which will enhance co-operation and increase expertise, and which in turn will make better use of the existing mechanisms and structures.

There will then be a policy debate on the proposed regulation on establishing a framework for interoperability between EU information systems. The legislation aims to create a more joined-up approach to EU JHA databases to prevent criminals and terrorists exploiting the gaps between them. The Government are assessing if these proposals would provide benefits to the UK, in particular if they would make UK law enforcement agencies' searching of data more efficient and represent value for money. These considerations will then inform whether the UK will opt in to the new systems.

On migration, the presidency will update on progress and the way forward on managing Mediterranean migration to build upon the concerted efforts across the EU last year which saw a marked reduction in the number of flows arriving in Europe in 2017. The UK supports the proposals as they align with our "whole of route" approach, which seeks to intervene at every stage of the migrant journey to reduce illegal migration and promote safe and orderly migration. I will be highlighting recent UK efforts in this space, including our record on resettlement having now resettled over 10,000 vulnerable refugees who have fled the Syrian crisis since 2014 as part of our commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees by 2020.

Justice day (9 March) will begin with a discussion on whether the recast of the Brussels Ila regulation should include a provision that obliges member states to ensure central authorities have sufficient financial and human resources to fulfil their role. The Government support adequate resourcing of central authorities, but do not believe that a provision to that effect should be included in the proposal, as such matters should be for member states to decide.

A general approach will be sought for the proposed directive on combating fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment, which aims to address the shortfalls of existing EU legislation in addressing the challenges in this area from organised crime. The UK has not opted in to this directive.

The presidency will give an update on the preparatory steps needed to be taken to ensure that the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) becomes operational in 2020. As the UK will not be participating in the EPPO, we will not intervene on this item.

The Commission will then provide an update on its work to improve law enforcement access to cross-border e-evidence. We expect the Commission to propose a

legislative proposal in this area in March. The Government recognise that this is an important issue to address but we want to ensure that the proposals do not duplicate any of the existing or proposed EU legislation or other international agreements in this space and that they do not jeopardise the existing practical co-operation we have with communication service providers.

The working lunch will discuss radicalisation in prisons. This is an opportunity to highlight the UK's approach to counter-terrorism and counter-extremism in prisons, and our commitment to working closely with our European partners to respond to common challenges in this area.

In addition to the substantive agenda items, the Commission will present to Justice Ministers its recommendation on illegal content on online platforms and its impact on the work under the code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech.

[HCWS520]

## PRIME MINISTER

### **Intimidation in Public Life Review: Government Response**

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** Today, I am pleased we are laying before both Houses the Government's response to the 17th report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life on intimidation in public life.

In July 2017, I 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 again thank the Committee for their considered and thorough report. Today we publish the Government's response to the report, which addresses the roles of the main players—Government, social media, the law, policing and prosecution, and political parties—and the range of actions the Government will take in both the immediate and longer-term.

It is not just politicians who have experienced unwarranted abuse—it has included journalists and other prominent figures in public life. Everyone deserves to be treated with tolerance and respect, and the British liberties of freedom of speech and freedom of association must always operate within the law. All those in public life need to demonstrate their opposition to intimidation and call it out, and report it when they see it. We must all work together to combat this issue.

[HCWS521]





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