

**Wednesday
25 April 2018**

**Volume 639
No. 127**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Wednesday 25 April 2018

House of Commons

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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—

Ties with the Rest of the UK

1. **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to strengthen ties between Scotland and the rest of the UK. [904844]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The United Kingdom is the vital Union for Scotland, and this Government will always work to strengthen the integrity of the UK. That includes working closely and constructively with the Scottish Government. But I was disappointed that, unlike the Welsh Government, Nicola Sturgeon has been unwilling to agree our proposed amendments to clause 11 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The Welsh Government have said that this is a deal that respects devolution. They have said:

“This is a deal we can work with which has required compromise on both sides.”

I absolutely agree, and I continue to hope that the Scottish Government will join us.

Luke Graham: I share my right hon. Friend's disappointment and surprise that the SNP Administration in Edinburgh have been unable to reach agreement with the Government. I ask him to work with those people in the devolved Government in Edinburgh who are willing to reach agreement to ensure that we put the politics of division behind us and work together so that we can move the conversation on for our constituents.

David Mundell: I absolutely agree. I was certainly very disappointed that the Scottish Government, despite sharing the same concerns as the Welsh Government, decided not to agree with this approach. We will of course continue to have a constructive dialogue with the Scottish Government, and I want to put it on the record that Mike Russell, the Scottish Minister, has put a lot of personal effort and commitment into getting this over the line, and I still hope that his Government will join him in reaching that agreement in the coming weeks.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): In the interests of facilitating negotiations, will the Secretary of State confirm whether the Lords will be asked to agree to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill on Third Reading before the Scottish Parliament has had time to consider a legislative consent memorandum?

David Mundell: What will happen is that today the UK Government will table an amendment to clause 11 of the withdrawal Bill in the House of Lords, on the basis agreed with the Welsh Government, and on the basis offered to the Scottish Government. The intergovernmental agreement accompanying the clause will also be published.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee has taken a close interest in this matter. Is he aware that we will be travelling to Edinburgh on Sunday, for hearings on Monday on the matter? I invite him to feel less disappointment and more hope, because the SNP Government have always insisted that their interests are aligned with those of the Welsh Government. Can we give the Scottish Government time to reflect on the fact that the Welsh Government now support the UK Government's position, and that they might wish to do so in future?

David Mundell: I am sure that the Committee will be made very welcome in Edinburgh. Anything that it can do to focus Nicola Sturgeon's mind on what has been offered, and what the Welsh Government have been able to sign up to, given that it protects the devolution settlement, will be very welcome. I hope that Nicola Sturgeon will think again.

Lesley Laird (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): May I first place on the record my congratulations to the Scottish Commonwealth games team on their success in Melbourne?

Coming back to the task in hand, it has been widely reported that Mike Russell was happy with the amendment and agreed to the deal, before being overruled by Nicola Sturgeon. Can the Secretary of State confirm whether there was an agreement on this issue from the Scottish Government at any point during the process?

David Mundell: What I can confirm is that there were extensive negotiations on the proposal, which has ultimately been agreed with the Welsh Government, and the Scottish Government were actively involved in those discussions. To be fair to Mike Russell, he has never led us to believe that there was any decision maker in the Scottish Government other than Nicola Sturgeon.

Mr Speaker: Order. These exchanges are rather ponderous. I am sorry, but we really need to speed up, because we have a lot of questions to get through. Let us get on with it.

Lesley Laird: I thank the Secretary of State for that non-response. The Labour party anticipated that political games would be played with the constitution. It is time for the people of Scotland to know exactly what has been going on behind closed doors, so will he tell me the truth and shame the devil, and agree to publish the minutes of all meetings and conversations between the Scottish and UK Governments and any member of the Conservative party or the SNP on clause 11?

David Mundell: What we will publish is the clause and the intergovernmental agreement that goes along with it, which is what the Welsh Government have signed up to. That is what was on the table for the Scottish Government to agree. It remains on the table.

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): The SNP's Brexit Minister, Mike Russell, said that he could not envisage a situation in which Scotland would be content and Wales would not be, or vice versa. Those words ring hollow today. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Nicola Sturgeon's belligerence in snubbing an agreement on clause 11 reminds us that the SNP believes in independence, manufactured grievance and a narrow nationalist agenda, which will always come before the good of the country?

David Mundell: Some people might conclude, given that Mike Russell did say that the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government were in exactly the same position, that there might be just one issue where there is a difference. That difference is that the Welsh Government believe in devolution and the Scottish Government believe in independence.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State think that taking the Scottish Parliament to court to overturn the democratic decision of that Parliament will help to strengthen the ties between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom?

David Mundell: No.

Pete Wishart: For the first time ever, I probably agree with the Secretary of State. It comes as no surprise to us that Welsh Labour has so easily capitulated to the Tories on this issue. We will never stop defending the integrity of our Parliament, and we will never allow the Tories to diminish our Parliament's powers. We will not allow that to happen. Is it the case with these amendments that, if the Scottish Parliament does not give its consent in these devolved areas within its responsibilities, the UK Government will simply overrule our democratic Parliament again? Is that what is going to happen?

David Mundell: I read recently on the hon. Gentleman's blog that the SNP should stop talking nonsense. He needs to take his own advice. Our position is still clear: we want to secure the agreement of the Scottish Government to our proposals in relation to clause 11. We have been very clear. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office has been clear. Our door is open. We hope that we will have direct discussions with the Scottish Government next week, and we hope that they will change their position and sign up, as the Welsh Government have, to proposals that protect the devolution settlement.

Leaving the EU: Scottish Exports

2. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to promote Scottish exports as the UK leaves the EU. [904845]

5. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to promote Scottish exports as the UK leaves the EU. [904849]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): From funding UK Export Finance support to re-establishing the Board of Trade, the UK Government are working to support all Scottish businesses that are looking to export or expand their operations abroad.

John Lamont: The Scottish borders have a number of industries with international reach, including the textiles industry, which is a global player in fashion. There is also an international market for food and drink from the borders, and indeed from across Scotland. Can my right hon. Friend reassure me that producers of textiles and of food and drink in the borders and across Scotland will be taken account of as part of the Brexit negotiations so that they can take advantage of the opportunities that Brexit presents?

David Mundell: My hon. Friend is always a champion for the businesses in the borders, and I can of course give him that reassurance. We are talking to producers in the borders, across Scotland and indeed across the UK to ensure that they can make the most of the opportunities around the world as we leave the EU.

David Duguid: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his response. Will he encourage the Secretary of State for International Trade to meet seafood processors during his visit to Aberdeen next month?

David Mundell: Scottish seafood is rightly famous around the world. I was pleased that my hon. Friend could join me earlier this month when I met the Scottish Seafood Association to discuss the impact of the EU exit. As I said then, there are growing opportunities for the sector in Scotland, and I would of course be happy both to meet the fish processing industry myself and to encourage my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade to do so.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Consistently, reports have said that Aberdeen is set to be hit the worst by Brexit, not least because of the number of incredibly successful exporting businesses we have. What is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that we stay in the single market and the customs union to protect businesses in Aberdeen?

David Mundell: The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that the Secretary of State for International Trade is visiting Aberdeen. We recognise Aberdeen's great exporting tradition, which is why we want to ensure that there are opportunities for Aberdeen's businesses around the world. This Government will not sign up to a customs union so that we can negotiate free trade agreements that allow businesses to take advantage of those opportunities.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The Netherlands has overtaken the USA as Scotland's biggest export market, which demonstrates the increasing importance of EU trade to the Scottish economy. The Secretary of State should be representing the voices and interests of Scotland in the Cabinet. With respect, he did not answer the question of the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) about the single market, because representing Scotland's interests can only mean arguing for continued membership of the single market.

David Mundell: I respect the Liberal Democrats' position that they want to stay in the EU and, indeed, to stop the UK and Scotland leaving the EU, but a decision has been made across the United Kingdom that it will leave

the EU. It is now incumbent on this Government to negotiate the best possible terms for that departure. The Government have made it absolutely clear that we will not be part of a customs union and will look to negotiate our own bespoke free trade agreement with the EU.

Renewable Energy Sector

3. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on supporting the renewable energy sector in Scotland. [904846]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has regular discussions with colleagues on a range of issues, including the renewable energy sector in Scotland. The Government remain committed to a thriving renewables industry across the UK, and Scotland is a central part of that, with up to £557 million of support being made available for new generation projects.

Liz McInnes: Given that we are an island, wave and tidal energy should be a priority for this Government. However, due to the allocation of funding through the contracts for difference scheme, wave and tidal energy have never secured funding, as they cannot compete financially with more established technologies. Will the Secretary of State undertake to review the way those allocations are carried out and consider allocating a specific pot to less established technologies?

Stuart Andrew: In previous rounds of contracts for difference, Scottish projects won 11 of the 25 contracts. On the specific point the hon. Lady makes, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has committed to raise the issue with the Minister responsible and will come back to her on that.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Recently, I visited the community hydro scheme in Callander, which is a first-class project that makes the best of our Scottish rain—there will be no shortage of that in the short term or the long term. What encouragement can the Department give to Scotland's hydro energy businesses?

Stuart Andrew: The next round of contracts for difference is expected in the spring of next year. That is an opportunity for new and innovative schemes to come forward for grants, and I suggest that an application be made.

Social Media Consultancies

4. **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What his Department's policy is on using social media consultancies. [904848]

9. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What his Department's policy is on using social media consultancies. [904853]

11. **Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): What his Department's policy is on using social media consultancies. [904855]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland does not currently use social media consultancies and has not done so in the past.

Neil Gray: Freedom of information requests published by *The Ferret* show that one advertising campaign from the Scotland Office targeted small business owners solely in the Secretary of State's Dumfriesshire constituency. Did he direct his officials in the Department to target his own constituency specifically?

David Mundell: There are very clear rules in relation to such matters. If the hon. Gentleman has any specific suggestion to make, he should take them up through that process.

Alan Brown: It must be more than a coincidence that the Scotland Office did a very targeted Facebook campaign in the Secretary of State's own constituency, excluding cohorts such as those with an interest in Scottish independence, so can he tell the House when he knew that his Department was using social media to target his constituents only?

David Mundell: I have clearly answered the point that the hon. Gentleman's colleague, the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), raised, and if he has specific suggestions that the very clear rules under which the Government operate have been breached, I would like to hear them. But it is very clear, for example, that the Scottish Government target specific audiences, and if he is saying that they do not, I would be very surprised to hear that.

Brendan O'Hara: We have been told that the Scotland Office published numerous Facebook posts to coincide with Government visits, but it appears that only the posts relating to the Secretary of State's constituency received a financial boost. If that is the case and the Scotland Office is seen to be micro-targeting tailored Facebook adverts only on voters in his constituency, does he consider that a misuse of taxpayers' money and an abuse of power?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman does have a track record of asking questions when he does not know what the answer is going to be. I return very clearly to the point that, if there are specific suggestions that the code under which the Government operate has been breached, they should be made and taken forward in the proper way. But if the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the Scottish Government do not target specific individuals with their material, he is misleading this House.

Mr Speaker: Well, if the hon. Gentleman were suggesting it, he would be, but he is not, so he is not. I am sure that the SNP is not accusing the Secretary of State of impropriety, as that would be the wrong thing to do on the Floor of the Chamber, but equally, I am sure that the Secretary of State is not making any accusation of impropriety.

David Mundell *indicated assent.*

Mr Speaker: I am grateful for the nod of the head from a sedentary position.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Cambridge Analytica claimed yesterday that the SNP's involvement with it was far more than Nicola Sturgeon has previously claimed. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the SNP

should be far more open and honest about its involvement with Cambridge Analytica, particularly with its own MPs?

David Mundell: Mr Speaker, I might well agree, but as I am sure you would tell me, I am not responsible for the SNP.

Mr Speaker: Indeed.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Did my right hon. Friend share my interest in the answers provided to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) by Cambridge Analytica yesterday, in the most recent hearing, and does he agree that it is important that the separatists are equally open about how they have used these consultancies?

David Mundell: What I agree with, and this is not necessarily the forum, is that the SNP has a very great many questions to answer about its involvement with Cambridge Analytica. Perhaps Mr Peter Murrell, when he deigns to speak to the MP group, will answer some of those questions for them.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is rather ironic that the SNP submitted this question en masse, given its subsequent unwillingness to offer basic transparency over the party's dealings with Cambridge Analytica, but I hope that today the Secretary of State can be more transparent than the SNP has been. While his Government decimate public services, his Department is spending £50,000 on targeted social media, so can he tell us what data the Scotland Office gathered on the public and whether he believes that this was an appropriate use of taxpayers' money?

David Mundell: The Scotland Office did not gather data on the public. We used established methods of advertising effectively on Facebook. If the hon. Gentleman pays attention to some of the debates and discussions in this House, he will know that many people now gain information through social media, so in terms of the Scotland Office fulfilling its obligation to the people of Scotland about what the Government and the Scotland Office are doing, social media is a perfectly appropriate channel to do it through.

Leaving the EU: Effect on Scotland

6. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect of the UK leaving the EU on Scotland. [904850]

8. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect of the UK leaving the EU on Scotland. [904852]

13. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect of the UK leaving the EU on Scotland. [904858]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I have regular discussions with the Prime Minister and Cabinet colleagues. The UK is committed to securing a deal that works for all parts of the UK, including Scotland.

Dr Whitford: The Home Office cap on tier 2 visas has been reached in each of the last four months, meaning that applications are now being prioritised according to the salary offered. As a result, the average salary now needed has risen from £30,000 to £55,000, meaning that the majority of such visas are likely to end up in high-income areas such as London, as companies in Scotland, and indeed the NHS, cannot simply double their salaries. Does the Secretary of State not accept that we in Scotland need our own immigration system so that we can recruit high-skilled professionals for our industries and NHS?

David Mundell: I do not accept that Scotland needs its own immigration system, and it was clear at the time of the Smith Commission agreement that immigration would not be devolved, but I will look into the specific issue the hon. Lady has raised.

Stuart C. McDonald: The Secretary of State's Government have repeatedly talked the talk about a partnership of equals, so will he explain where on earth is the equity and partnership in proposals that the Westminster Parliament be able to restrict the Scottish Parliament's powers for up to seven years without its consent?

David Mundell: As I made clear earlier, the UK Government are committed to working with the Scottish Government, but we are not just partners; what the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues cannot accept is that Scotland is part of the United Kingdom, and that is the nature of the agreement we have reached, which the Welsh Government say protects the devolution settlement.

Angela Crawley: The SNP asked the Secretary of State countless times whether amendments to clause 11 of the EU withdrawal Bill would be tabled to protect devolution, and time and again he promised that they would. The Scottish Government have drafted amendments and provided proposals, but the Westminster Government have ignored all of them. Is this not just another broken Tory promise to Scotland?

David Mundell: I am sure that question looked better written down than it sounded. The Welsh Government, who Mike Russell only last week said were fully aligned with the Scottish Government's purpose and requirements, have made it clear that the amendment we are lodging to the EU withdrawal Bill protects the devolution settlement.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): East Renfrewshire has a vibrant business community, but only 75 of its businesses have more than 20 employees, and by far their most important market is the rest of the UK. What reassurances can my right hon. Friend give them that as the UK leaves the EU they will have seamless access to the rest of the UK?

David Mundell: The debate on clause 11 arose because of the importance to businesses in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland of retaining that UK market, which is why we place such importance on getting that right. I believe our amendment does just that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Bill Grant. No? He was bobbing previously. Does he want to get in?

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): My question has been answered, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is in danger of setting a precedent against repetition in the House of Commons, but it is an isolated case. I am grateful to him.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Two thirds of the UK's jobs in financial and professional services are outside London and many are in Scotland. Reuters estimates that 5,000 jobs in financial services might move because of Brexit. What advice has the Secretary of State been given about how this could affect jobs in Scotland?

David Mundell: The hon. Lady is right. It is very important that everyone is clear that financial services are not just in the City of London but are hugely important in Scotland and the other constituent parts of the UK. That is why we are fighting for a good deal from the EU on financial services.

Leaving the EU: Scottish Economy

7. **Ged Killen** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on the Scottish economy of the UK leaving the EU without an agreement in place. [904851]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): We want our future relationship with the EU to be a deep and special partnership that takes in both economic and security co-operation. We are confident that this is in the interests of both sides, so we approach these negotiations anticipating success. We do not want or expect a no deal outcome.

Ged Killen: In its year-end report, the Fraser of Allander Institute pointed to uncertainty over Brexit as one of the principal drags on the Scottish economy. The people of Scotland are fed up with the ongoing pantomime that is the relationship between the Scottish Tories and the SNP. What meetings has the Secretary of State had with the Scottish Government on clause 11, and how does he intend to bring this farce to a close?

Stuart Andrew: I think my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it very clear that we want the Scottish Government to agree to the clause 11 amendment as the Welsh Government have. The Welsh Government have accepted that the UK Government have gone a long way, and I hope that the Scottish Government are listening and will take part.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: A single sentence will suffice. Christine Jardine.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the Minister agree that the most important way of mitigating the disastrous effects of Brexit in Scotland would be an agreement between the two Governments?

Will he encourage the Scottish Government to stop their constitutional posturing and think about what the people actually want?

Stuart Andrew: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. She has made a very important point. The Welsh Government have accepted that this is a sensible way forward, and it is time that Scotland did exactly the same.

Universal Credit: Low-Income Families

10. **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect on low-income families of the roll-out of universal credit in Scotland. [904854]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): Universal credit is transforming lives across the country. Research shows that universal credit claimants spend more time searching and applying for work than those on previous benefits. There are now more than 100,000 fewer workless households in Scotland than there were seven years ago.

David Hanson: The Trussell Trust reports that there was a 17% increase in food bank use in Scotland last year. Could that be linked in any way to universal credit?

Stuart Andrew: I think it is widely accepted that there are many reasons why people use food banks, and many different issues. Even the all-party parliamentary group on hunger and food poverty has accepted that. We have rolled out universal credit slowly and made changes when we have considered them to be necessary, and we continue to do so.

Mr Speaker: Finally and briefly, Patricia Gibson.

Ayrshire Growth Deal

12. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the progress of the Ayrshire growth deal. [904857]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I am sure the hon. Lady will join me in welcoming the commitment made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when she visited Ayr and said that the UK Government were opening talks to deliver such a deal.

Patricia Gibson: Given that the Secretary of State has told me on the Floor of the House that he shares my frustration at the lack of progress on the deal, and given that the Prime Minister has now committed herself to it publicly, will he finally, at long last, for the love of God, give us a timetable?

David Mundell: I think that somewhere in the hon. Lady's question there was a note of positivity about the fact that the UK Government have committed themselves to taking the deal forward. We are working closely with the local authorities and other partners on a timetable.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The timing of the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) could be improved, as I tried to call him a few moments ago, but I am in a generous mood. Let us hear the fella.

Bill Grant: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the city and growth deals that cover the vast majority of Scotland are a great example of what can be achieved when Governments and authorities work closely together rather than picking a fight with one another?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Let me add that it is his disposition—his bonhomie—that takes deals and arrangements forward, rather than the negativity and hostility of some.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [904929] **Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 25 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in offering our warmest congratulations to their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on the birth of their son earlier this week.

I know that Members on both sides of the House will also want to join me in marking Stephen Lawrence's death 25 years ago. For each of those years, the Lawrence family have fought heroically to ensure that their son's life and death will never be forgotten. As I announced earlier this week, the Government will work with the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust to establish a national annual commemoration of Stephen's life and legacy.

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

Gavin Robinson: My colleagues and I acknowledge the fortitude of the Lawrence family, and, indeed, the joy that the nation shares on the occasion of a royal birth.

In 2017, through the confidence and supply agreement, the Prime Minister not only recognised the need to give Northern Ireland an economic boost but agreed to a package of measures, including a Belfast region city deal, a city deal for others, and ultra-fast broadband investment. That will transform our part of this United Kingdom. In response to the eager anticipation of our communities and in reaffirming her commitment, will she ensure that sufficient progress is made to advance both in time for the autumn Budget?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important issue. He is absolutely right: the Government have set out several public commitments, including in the confidence and supply agreement, to work towards a comprehensive and ambitious set of city deals across Northern Ireland. There is progress being made, which I welcome, by the Belfast city region partners in developing the city deal proposals. I look forward to their submission, which will obviously be considered by the Government. Of course, in the absence of an Executive, there are

some issues to work through, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Northern Ireland Secretary is committed to working positively with partners in the UK Government, the Belfast city region and the Northern Ireland civil service to progress the city deal.

Mr Speaker: I call Andrew Bowie.

Q4. [904932] **Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Earlier than expected, Mr Speaker; thank you very much. Yesterday, the Welsh Government reached an agreement with Her Majesty's Government on the withdrawal Bill. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is in the interests of Scottish business and the Scottish people that the Scottish National party leadership should do the same and reach a similar agreement as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased that we are making progress on the withdrawal Bill. I think that has been acknowledged by all sides, and after many months of negotiation—I pay tribute to my right hon. Friends, particularly the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for the work he has done in those negotiations—we have reached agreement with the Welsh Government. That is a significant achievement and will provide legal certainty, increase the powers of the devolved Governments and respect the devolution settlements. We have made considerable changes to the Bill to reflect issues raised by Members and the devolved Administrations. It is indeed disappointing that the Scottish Government have not yet felt able to add their agreement to the new amendments, and we sincerely hope that they will reconsider their position.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in congratulating the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on the birth of their baby and I wish them well.

We should also reflect on the fact that Doreen and Neville Lawrence fought for years to get justice for the death of their son. The Macpherson inquiry showed that institutional racism was a major factor in the inquiry. We need to drive out institutional racism in all its forms, wherever it raises its head within our society. We recognise that the Home Secretary has rightly apologised to the Windrush generation and made a commitment to compensate people for the hardship they have endured. The Government are committed to compensation in theory, but as yet nothing in practice. There is an understandable lack of trust on the part of the Windrush generation, so can the Prime Minister today be clear and confirm that those British citizens, who have worked, paid taxes here for decades and been wrongly denied pensions and benefits, will be fully compensated?

The Prime Minister: It is absolutely right that across this House we should all be absolutely clear in our determination to ensure that we stamp out racism in every form. Let me set out to the House the action that has been taken. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made very clear the offering in her statement to the House that those who came here before 1 January 1973 from Commonwealth countries—this is from Commonwealth countries as a whole—will be offered citizenship status without paying the fee and without

taking the knowledge of language and “Life in the UK” test. The children of the Windrush generation who are in the UK will in most cases be British citizens already, but where that is not the case, they will be able to apply to naturalise at no further cost.

We are also taking action in relation to those who made their life here but retired to their country of origin and have found it difficult or impossible to return to the UK. We will work with high commissions to make sure that they can easily access the offer of formal British citizenship, because the Windrush generation are British; they are part of us. There will be a compensation scheme, the details of which my right hon. Friend will set out in due course, but I think everybody will see that the action the Government have taken is because we know the Windrush generation—[*Interruption.*] The Labour Front Benchers shake their heads and go, “Oh no!” The Windrush generation are British, they are part of us, and we will ensure that.

Jeremy Corbyn: It is not an act of generosity to waive citizenship fees when they are British citizens already. They should be granted full status immediately. Four years ago, an internal Home Office memo stated that the right hon. Lady’s “hostile environment” policy could make it harder for people like the Windrush generation to find homes and that it could “provoke discrimination”. Why did the Home Secretary ignore that memo?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about a “hostile environment”:

“What we are proposing here will, I think, flush illegal migrants out. We are trying to create a much more hostile environment in this country if you are here illegally.”

Those are not my words; they are the words of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) when he was Labour’s Immigration Minister. The Labour leader ought to know about this because the right hon. Gentleman sits on his Front Bench.

Jeremy Corbyn: What I am talking about is the Windrush generation of people who came here completely legally. The Prime Minister herself was warned directly about these policies in 2014 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who is now the shadow Home Secretary. And when the Immigration Act 2014 was going through Parliament, the then Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, wrote to the right hon. Lady warning:

“The costs and risks considerably outweigh the benefits”.

Why did the Prime Minister ignore his advice as well as the request from my right hon. Friend?

The Prime Minister: In relation to the Windrush generation, we have made it absolutely clear that those people who came here from the Commonwealth before 1 January 1973 have a right to be here: they are British, they are part of us. The problem at the time was that they were not documented with that right, and that is what we are now putting right. He talks about action that the Government have taken in relation to those who are here illegally. The Windrush generation are here legally. Action against those who are here illegally has been taken by successive Governments. Checks on someone’s right to work here came in in 1997, measures on access to benefits in 1999 and civil penalties for

employing illegal migrants in 2008—both under a Labour Government. Why have these actions been taken? Because people up and down this country want to ensure that the Government are taking action on those people who are here illegally. It is not fair to those people who work hard, who have a right to be here and who have contributed to this country if they see people who are here illegally being given the same access to rights and services.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister seems to want to get away from the injustice done to the Windrush generation. The Equalities and Human and Rights Commission warned her about the Immigration Act 2016, saying that the Bill

“is likely to lead to destitution and may cause inhuman and degrading treatment, in breach of Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights”.

The Government have quite rightly apologised for the scandalous way in which British citizens have been treated, but it was due to the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts, so will the Prime Minister now commit to reviewing that legislation to make sure this never happens again?

The Prime Minister: As I set out for the House last week, this is a generation who came here prior to 1973—[*Interruption.*] Labour Front Benchers say “We know this,” but the questions that the right hon. Gentleman is asking suggest that they are ignoring some of the facts in relation to this. This is a generation who came here prior to 1973. We are not ignoring the problems that some members of this generation are facing. That is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set up a special team in the Home Office, not just to deal with their inquiries but to actively help them find the documentation to clarify their status. That is why we have made the offer that my right hon. Friend made of ensuring that we can give them formal British citizenship which recognises that they are British but does so in a formal, documented way. The problem was that, prior to 1973 when the Windrush generation came here, they were not given documents that set out their status. We are now putting that right, and we will leave no stone unturned to put that right.

Jeremy Corbyn: In 2013, the then Home Secretary said that introducing the legislation was about creating “a really hostile environment”. Had the Windrush generation not mounted a campaign and had Opposition Members not raised the matter persistently, there would have been no compensation, no review and no apology. Any review of legislation needs to go wider than just immigration law. The dismantling of legal aid provision in 2012 made the impact of the Immigration Act 2014 harder to challenge. The policies swept up British citizens and legal migrants, causing them immense suffering, as the Prime Minister was warned. Will the Prime Minister send a clear message today and tell us that the hostile environment is over and that her bogus immigration targets, which have driven the hostile culture, will be scrapped? The Windrush generation have served this country and deserve better than this.

The Prime Minister: The Windrush generation are British. They have contributed to this country. They have made their life here. This is about dealing with those people who are in this country illegally—not the Windrush generation, who are here legally. I say to the

right hon. Gentleman again that I have quoted the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill from when he was Labour's Immigration Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition referred to 2013. In 2013, the then shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), said that

"we need much stronger action from Government to bring illegal immigration down."

That is—*[Interruption.]* Labour Front Benchers are saying that the Windrush generation are not illegal. They are not illegal; they are here legally. That is why we are providing support to enable them to get the documents for their status. What the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition is talking about is whether we should deal with illegal immigration, and up and down the country the British public will tell him that we should deal with illegal immigration.

Jeremy Corbyn: We are talking about the environment created by the Prime Minister when she was Home Secretary for six years, when she knew full well of the problems that the Windrush generation were facing, and at last she has been forced to act upon that.

Last week, the current Home Secretary admitted that the Home Office

"sometimes loses sight of the individual."—*[Official Report, 16 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 28.]*

Yet we now know that when she took over from her predecessor, her intent was to harden this cruel and misdirected policy, pledging to do so "ruthlessly". A report last month by immigration officials stated that "hostile environment" measures were not even having the desired effect. The current Home Secretary inherited a failing policy and made it worse. Is it not time she took responsibility and resigned? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The House must calm itself. We have a long way to go and a lot of Back Benchers' questions to reach. Let us hear the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Up and down this country, people want to ensure that the Government are taking action against those people who are here in this country illegally, because it is not fair that people who work hard day in and day out, who contribute to this country and who put into the life of this country are seeing people who are here illegally accessing services in the same way.

We are acting to ensure that those people who are here legally are given the support they need. We welcomed the Windrush generation those many years ago. They are British, they are part of us, and we are ensuring that they remain here and are able to continue to live their lives here. But it is also right that this Government take action against those people who are accessing services despite being here illegally, not putting in and not contributing to this country.

If the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about issues of fairness, if he wants to talk about a Government that is kind, let us look and see what a Labour Government would be like, because a Labour Government would wreck our economy, would damage people's jobs, would tax people and would end up with debt for future generations. That is not a Labour Government that would be kind or fair to anybody.

Q7. [904935] John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I am sure the whole House will want to pass on our condolences to the family of Matt Campbell, who sadly died taking part in the London marathon on Sunday.

Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the 40,000 runners, including many right hon. and hon. Members, who completed the marathon, raising huge amounts of money for local charities and good causes across the United Kingdom? In particular, we should thank the volunteers, medics and ambulance staff who made the event as safe as possible.

Mr Speaker: Including the hon. Gentleman. He should not be too shy about it.

The Prime Minister: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Matt Campbell. I understand Matt Campbell's JustGiving page has now raised over £140,000 for the Brathay Trust, which works to inspire vulnerable young people to make positive changes in their life. I am sure Members across the House will want to join me in offering condolences to Matt Campbell's family and friends, but I am also happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the runners in this weekend's London marathon, including the 15 Members of this House who competed.

If I may say so, I particularly congratulate my hon. Friend, who was the fastest Member of Parliament in the marathon, completing it—we should have it on the record—in 3 hours and 38 minutes. Many congratulations to him.

It is also right that we pay tribute to the ambulance workers and medical staff for all they did on the day to enable the marathon to take place.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On behalf of those of us on the SNP Benches, I pass on our congratulations to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on the birth of their son. I associate myself with the Prime Minister's remarks on Stephen Lawrence.

The CBI, the National Farmers Union, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, the House of Lords and, overwhelmingly, Members of this House want the UK to remain in the customs union. Why is the Prime Minister on the side of her cynical Brexiteers and Front Benchers and not working in the interests of all the nations of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: The British people voted to leave the European Union. In voting to leave the European Union, they voted to leave the single market and the customs union. What we want to ensure is that, as a country, we are able to independently negotiate free trade deals around the rest of the world, that we deliver on our commitment to no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and that we have as frictionless a border as possible between the United Kingdom and the European Union. What businesses tell me is that they want a tariff-free, frictionless border, and that is what we are negotiating for them.

Ian Blackford: That answer simply is not good enough. The single market and the customs union, quite simply, were not on the ballot paper. The Prime Minister's own Government analysis shows that almost every sector of the economy in every region of the United Kingdom

would be negatively impacted if the UK left the customs union. Negotiations in Brussels are effectively at a standstill because the Government are bereft of ideas for how to deal with the Irish border issue.

Why is it that jobs, living standards and even the Good Friday agreement are all secondary concerns to this Government? Will the Prime Minister confirm now that if this place votes in favour of a customs union, that will be the negotiating position of her Government?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong in so many of the statements that he has just made. First, this Government are not bereft of ideas on how we can approach the issue of the Northern Ireland border, because we have published proposals for dealing with that very issue. If he wants to listen to Scottish businesses, I suggest he listen to those businesses—the Food and Drink Federation Scotland, Scottish Bakers and the Scottish Retail Consortium—that just yesterday said:

“Scotland’s businesses benefit enormously from the existing and largely unfettered UK single market.”

The Scottish National party Government in Scotland should listen to that.

Q9. [904937] Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): At Thursday’s recovery meeting in Salisbury, the public were told that nine Novichok hotspots remain in and around the city and that the clean-up may take until the end of the year. In thanking the Prime Minister for her very close interest in this matter, may I ask what more can be done to expedite the clean-up, so that life in south Wiltshire can return to normal as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising an important issue, on which I am happy to update the House. First, let me make it absolutely clear that Public Health England has said that Salisbury is safe for residents and visitors, and there is no need for anyone to take any additional precautions. Cordons are in place to protect the public while decontamination work is carried out on the sites he has referred to. After decontamination is undertaken at each site, sampling will be carried out to ensure that the sites are safe to be released back to the public. I assure him that the need to expedite this work is well recognised, but we want, of course, to ensure that it is done in a way so that those sites will in the future be available to, and safe for, the public.

Q2. [904930] Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): About 20 of my constituents, most of whom are living around Harthill, and 4,000 other low-paid workers around the UK are waiting for money that is rightfully theirs. They have been waiting for 20 years. Some will have died waiting, and others are now seriously ill. Mr Speaker, you represent, as do others across this House, constituents who are waiting for their payout from the Roadchef employee benefit trust, which has been trying to get Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs to take a decision on £10 million wrongly paid to it 18 years ago. Will the Prime Minister join me today in calling on HMRC to finally decide on this case and get the money back to the people who rightly deserve it?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the hon. Gentleman raised this case with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer last week. My right

hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has offered to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the wider issue. HMRC is working closely with the trustees’ representatives to resolve the case and will be meeting them next month. HMRC is operationally independent, and that is important. It must of course apply the law fairly and collect the taxes set out in legislation by Parliament, but it is working with the trustees’ representatives, and as I said, the Financial Secretary is happy to meet him to discuss this.

Q12. [904941] Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I commend my right hon. Friend for reaffirming the Government’s clear position that we will not be remaining in any form of a customs union? While we are on the EU, will she reassure fishermen in South Dorset and around the country, especially the under-10-metre fleet, that they will not be disadvantaged by any incoming EU policies during the implementation period?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, this question of the fisheries is a matter that my hon. Friend and others have raised previously. Let me reassure him that, during the implementation period we have negotiated, the UK’s share of catch cannot be reduced. This safeguards the livelihoods of our fishing communities and, importantly, also delivers a smooth and orderly Brexit. There is also an obligation in the agreement on both sides to act in good faith throughout that implementation period, and any attempts by the EU to harm the UK fishing industry would obviously breach that obligation. Obviously, in December 2020, we will be negotiating fishing opportunities as a third country—as a fully independent coastal state—deciding who can have access to our waters and on what terms for the first time in more than 40 years.

Q3. [904931] Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): The Prime Minister will be aware that in my constituency we are putting the finishing touches to our second aircraft carrier the *Prince of Wales*, but as we near the end of that contract, more than 400 people in the Rosyth yard are now facing redundancy, with many more job losses in the pipeline. Will she visit my constituency to explain to the Rosyth workforce, face to face, why her Government intend to award a £1 billion shipbuilding contract to yards outwith these islands when we have the skills, talent and infrastructure to deliver right here?

The Prime Minister: What we are doing through our national shipbuilding strategy is focusing on giving the Royal Navy the ships it needs, while increasing economic growth across the country and investing in a more skilled workforce. We are encouraging a more competitive industry in shipbuilding and growing jobs across the country. The hon. Gentleman may have been referring to the future support ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary that are being procured through international competition. Three ships will be built in the fleet solid support programme. They will be subject to international competition to secure the best possible value for money for the UK taxpayer. Through our national shipbuilding strategy, we are ensuring that we develop that shipbuilding capability in the UK, so that we can encourage all UK shipyards with the necessary skills and expertise to continue to engage in that programme.

Q13. [904942] David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, according to the World Health Organisation, the second largest medical system

in the world, with 300,000 doctors treating 200 million patients every year, is homeopathy—[HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] That is the evidence. Will my right hon. Friend congratulate—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. That is very discourteous. I want to hear the views of the hon. Gentleman on this matter.

David Tredinnick: Will my right hon. Friend congratulate the doctors who are members of the Faculty of Homeopathy on their work in the health service, particularly in dealing with cases that are too difficult to treat conventionally? Does she agree that homeopathic vets should be able to make their own minds up about whether to use homeopathy on its own or with other treatments, too?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has been a long-standing advocate in this House for homeopathy. Obviously, some patients who are treated in the NHS and the private sector are users of complementary and alternative therapies, but it is the responsibility of the local NHS to make decisions on the commissioning and funding of healthcare treatments and to take account of issues with safety, clinical and cost-effectiveness, and the availability of suitably qualified and regulated practitioners. As regards all the issues he has addressed, it is right that those who are professionally able to make these judgments are left to make them.

Q5. [904933] **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): In my constituency of Heywood and Middleton, in the Borough of Rochdale, one year 6 child in three is overweight or obese. With our children being bombarded with junk food adds on their favourite television programmes, billboards and even bus tickets, will the Prime Minister take the bold steps needed to tackle junk food marketing, support Jamie Oliver's latest campaign and say that she, too, has “#AdEnough”?

The Prime Minister: We already have plans to tackle childhood obesity that are world leading. No other developed country has done anything as ambitious. Our soft drinks industry levy is a bold action that we are taking, and our sugar reduction programme will cut the amounts of sugar consumed by young people. Of course, we are also putting in plans for the amount of exercise and physical activity primary school children get every day. Those steps will make a real difference and help reverse a problem that has been decades in the making, but of course we have not ruled out further action if the right results are not seen.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that events since the very powerful debate on anti-Semitism that we held in this Chamber have demonstrated that Labour is still not taking these problems seriously and that it now needs to take urgent action to root out this form of racism from its party?

The Prime Minister: Of course, my right hon. Friend raises an extremely important issue. As I said at the beginning in response to the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition, it is important that everybody across the House takes action to stamp out racism in all its forms. I include anti-Semitism in that.

Q6. [904934] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I see the results of the Prime Minister's “hostile environment” in my casework every single day. My constituents, Mr Shaikh and Ms Gul, applied for leave to remain on the same day, 27 March 2017. His was granted, but hers was refused on 28 March—a full year later. The couple's five-year-old and their four-month-old are both British citizens, but Ms Gul has been told that she should be ready to leave the UK. Why does the Prime Minister want to separate this family, and will she intervene?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady knows full well that those who work in the UK Visas and Immigration section of the Home Office look at every case very carefully. She has made her point in this House, and I am sure that the Home Office will look again at that case.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): The City of London has recently topped the worldwide Z/Yen index and it supports 450,000 jobs and is worth £45 billion to the UK economy. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential for both the EU and the UK that the final Brexit agreement supports these financial services, because otherwise they will simply move elsewhere in the world?

The Prime Minister: That is an important issue and I referred to it in my Mansion House speech. I said that we wanted to ensure that financial services were a part of the deep and comprehensive partnership that we wished to build with the EU27. Our goal should be to establish access to each other's markets. That should be based on maintaining the same regulatory outcomes over time, with a mechanism that determines proportionate consequences where they are not maintained. That is part of my ambition for an economic partnership with the European Union that goes way beyond any existing free trade agreement, covering more sectors and co-operating more fully. My hon. Friend is right that if firms and financial services are looking to go elsewhere, they are more likely to look to go elsewhere in the world, rather than elsewhere in Europe.

Q8. [904936] **Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): A stem cell transplant can be a life-saving treatment for people with blood cancer. Recent research shows that having a younger stem cell donor improves a patient's chance of surviving post-transplant. Will the Prime Minister join me in supporting the upcoming “Be a Lifesaver” campaign by the charity Anthony Nolan, which aims to recruit more young people aged 16 to 30 to the stem cell donor register? Will she congratulate the 1,000 people in Coventry North East and all others who are already signed up to be donors?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join the hon. Lady in congratulating those people in Coventry and elsewhere who have already signed up to be donors. Anthony Nolan has done excellent work over many years. I was not aware of that particular campaign, but I will certainly look into it. It sounds like a very good campaign, and I am sure that she will be encouraging other Members of this House to support it as well.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Increasing numbers of children of school age are now being educated at home. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is important to ensure that those children receive an education that is appropriate for their needs?

The Prime Minister: This is very important. Parents will sometimes decide to educate their children at home, and they will have their reasons for wishing to do so, but it is important that those children get an appropriate quality and level of education. I reassure my hon. Friend that I know that the Secretary of State for Education is looking at the issue.

Q10. [904938] **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): On Saturday, I met a lovely young couple who had all but given up hope of ever being able to buy their own home, but thanks to an innovative and genuinely affordable housing scheme by Manchester City Council, they have just moved into their own house, right near the university. Will the Prime Minister join me in praising Manchester Labour, which, despite her Government's planning and funding restrictions, has built many hundreds of truly affordable homes in my constituency, and will have another 2,000 coming on stream very soon?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to say to the hon. Lady that I think it is important that we are providing and building more homes for people, and that within that we include affordable homes, too. I am pleased to say that, since we came into office in 2010, we have delivered more affordable homes than the previous Labour Government did in their last seven years in office. The Government are in fact working with Manchester—with the Mayor of Manchester and the combined authority—to ensure that we are supporting them in certain areas with funding, encouraging that building of affordable homes, and indeed ensuring that there are homes to which young people can aspire, so that those who never thought they would be able to get their foot on the property ladder can do so.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Morley Newlands Academy scored “outstanding” during a recent Ofsted inspection, and Bruntcliffe Academy in Morley scored “good” for the very first time in its history. Will the Prime Minister confirm to the House that an additional 1.8 million children since 2010 are now taught in “good” and “outstanding” schools, under this Conservative Government? I hope that the Prime Minister will join me in congratulating the principals, teachers, staff and students of the two schools on their hard work to attain this admirable achievement.

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the teachers, heads and all the staff of those two schools on their achievements, which have resulted from the work that they have been doing. She asked me to confirm that there are now 1.8 million more children in “good” or “outstanding” schools. I am afraid that I am not able to confirm that because, in fact, there are now 1.9 million more children in “good” or “outstanding” schools.

Q11. [904940] **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): My constituent, Anthony, who lives with a chronic, disabling illness, worked all his life until finishing on medical grounds three years ago. From 2002, he received disability living allowance, but last year he was transferred to personal independence payments and his mobility allowance was cut. Yesterday, Anthony handed back the mobility vehicle that he has had for 16 years. Today he is housebound and fearful for his future. The total

injustice of the system means that he now faces a nine-month wait for his appeal at Liverpool tribunal services. What message does the Prime Minister have for Anthony as he adjusts to his new life as a prisoner in his own home?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry to hear of that case. As all Members will know, there are cases where people have had to appeal against such judgments. I will ensure that the Department for Work and Pensions is aware of the case raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): In October last year, the national bereavement care pathway was launched in 11 pilot sites. Last week, it launched in a further 21 hospital sites. I am delighted to announce that yesterday, the Government set aside funding for a national roll-out of the national bereavement care pathway. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming that funding, which will make such a difference to bereaved parents up and down the country?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has championed and campaigned on this subject with great personal commitment. I recognise the importance of providing this bereavement counselling and of supporting parents in the most difficult circumstances of having lost a child. That is why the Government are providing this funding.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): The Prime Minister will be aware of the concern that if the Home Office cannot deal humanely and efficiently with the immigration status of 50,000 UK residents of Caribbean origin, it will seriously struggle to deal efficiently and humanely with the registration of 3 million European nationals. Will she address the particular concern that the Home Office is now taking powers, under the Data Protection Bill, to cover up future mistakes by blocking access to individual files sought by individuals and their lawyers to check the accuracy of their data?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's interpretation is not correct. It will be possible for people to access the information that they need. He mentioned the issue of EU citizens. There is a real difference between that case and the situation where people came to this country but were not given documented status here. That is the issue with which we are dealing regarding the Windrush generation. They have contributed to this country and lived here, but when they came here they were not given that documentary evidence. There is a difference in the system that we are putting in place for EU citizens, who are being encouraged and asked to apply for settled status, so that they have evidence of their status. We are ensuring that this problem will not occur in relation to EU citizens.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): This week in this place, we have been talking about higher education. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the action the Government are taking shows that a Conservative Government are committed to delivering for students, working with them and treating them as adults, in stark contrast to Opposition Members, who look to win votes from young people by offering illogical and undeliverable free stuff?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The review we are bringing in on tertiary education is about ensuring not just that the funding and financing of tertiary education is right, but that young people have access to the routes through education, be it technical or university, that suit their particular needs. Of course, last year the Leader of the Opposition said that he would deal with student debt. Students thought he was going to abolish student debt. What happens after the election? He goes back on his promise.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I was not going to raise this, but the Prime Minister quoted me. Let me say this to the Prime Minister: do not try to hide behind me or the Labour party when she was warned repeatedly of the damage that her obsession with her migration target was doing. Do not try to hide behind the Cabinet when they do not agree with her on this and are trying to clear up the mess, and do not try to hide behind civil servants—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not having the questioner interrupted. The question will be heard and it will be heard in full, and that is the end of it.

Yvette Cooper: Do not try to hide behind civil servants when she set the policies and instilled in them the culture of hostility, and when the high commissioners told us this morning that they had warned the Foreign Office about the Windrush generation immigration problem in 2016. What did she do? Because a few years ago the Prime Minister said:

“I’m actually sick and tired of government ministers...who simply blame other people when something goes wrong”.

What has changed?

The Prime Minister: Nobody is trying to blame anybody else. The question of the Windrush generation arises from the fact that when they came here, their status to live here was not documented. Over the years—*[Interruption.]* Yes, there have been individual cases over the years of people who have had to regularise their documentation and have done so. We have now seen cases of people in difficulty because they have not been able to do that. That is why the Home Office is taking action to deal with that. But under Governments of every colour, including the Government in which the right hon. Lady served, action has been taken against illegal immigrants. This does not apply to the Windrush generation. They are here; they are British; they have a right to be here. Under Labour, action was taken for a compliant environment; under the Conservatives, action has been taken to deal with illegal immigrants. That is what we are doing.

I have apologised to the Windrush generation and I do so again. We are doing everything we can to ensure that they are reassured, and that they do not have the anxiety that some of that generation have had. But we also owe it to them and to the British people to ensure that we deal with people who are here illegally.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend still subscribe to her excellent maxim that no deal is better than a bad deal, and does she

acknowledge that locking ourselves into a customs union with the EU after Brexit would be a very bad deal indeed?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to confirm what I have always said: no deal is better than a bad deal. As regards being in a customs union, that means that we would not be able to negotiate our own trade deals around the rest of the world, and we want to be able to do that. As I saw last week at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, there is considerable interest around the rest of the world in being able to have those independent trade deals negotiated between other countries and the UK.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): In 2011, I wrote to the Prime Minister’s then Immigration Minister, the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), about my constituent who came here in 1956 aged four, and in 2011 was told that he could no longer work and he did not have British citizenship. Her Minister wrote to me and basically said, “Tough.” Can she now explain in a little more detail what compensation will be available for my constituent, who has been unable to work since 2011—for seven years? Will she also, importantly for many people who are feeling vulnerable and scared, assure them that if they ring her hotline, they will see no enforcement action to remove them from the country, because they are scared when ringing that hotline?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, obviously, individual cases will have different circumstances, but my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be setting out the compensation scheme shortly.

On the right hon. Gentleman’s second point, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear on a number of occasions that the hotline is there to help people get the documents they need to clarify their status, such that they do not suffer from the problems that the right hon. Gentleman’s constituent has suffered from in the past. The Home Secretary has also made it clear that there is no question of taking enforcement action when people ring that hotline. We actively want people to ring that hotline, to bring their cases forward, so that the Home Office can help them to ensure that they have got the documents needed, so that they can be reassured and will not see any problems in the future.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Let us hear from a baron—John Baron.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for a very positive meeting about the need for NHS England to release all of the £200 million cancer transformation funding to frontline services, so that they can better deliver on the cancer strategy. However, the system has been painfully slow in following through on what was agreed at that meeting. If that continues, will the Prime Minister meet me, so that we can unblock the logjam on behalf of cancer patients and their families?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry to hear that there has still been some slowness in the system. I will look into the matter, and if we are not able to unblock it, I am quite happy to meet my hon. Friend again.

Points of Order

12.51 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For the first time since the birth of devolution, the Westminster Government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is too much noise as people are leaving the Chamber, so we will pause for a moment. I would not want the gravamen of the hon. Lady's inquiry to go unheard or inadequately heard. If people toddling out of the Chamber could do so quickly and quietly, that would be much appreciated by the hon. Lady and doubtless by others. With a bit of projection, I think we will hear her.

Liz Saville Roberts: I greatly thank you, Mr Speaker, for your support for my point of order.

For the first time since the birth of devolution, the Westminster Government have succeeded in clawing back powers that should be held by our National Assembly. That will have major consequences for the UK's constitution, and it is all thanks to the Labour party in Wales. Despite the profound significance of that backroom deal, it has been raised by the UK Government through written statement only. Can you advise me how best to request an oral statement in the Chamber and to whom I should direct such a request?

Mr Speaker: My interpretation of what the hon. Lady just said is, "I don't like just having to content myself with a written statement; I want an oral. Mr Speaker, can I register my point?" The truth of the matter is, as she is very well aware, that that is precisely what she has just done to considerable effect, in the sense that it has been heard. Whether there will now be an oral statement, I do not know, but events take place and matters evolve. If in subsequent days she is not satisfied, she can always seek, if she thinks the matter warrants the urgent attention of the House, to persuade me that it does, and I will have to judge on a case-by-case basis. For today, she has done her best.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. It is actually worse than that. These issues and matters are being determined in the unelected House of Lords, yet democratically elected Members of Parliament will have no say in the outcome. Is there anything we can do to wrest back control, to ensure that it is democratically elected Members of Parliament who determine and decide these very important issues?

Mr Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that I think we can await the return of the Lords amendments, and then this Chamber can come to a view about those amendments. I rather imagine that it will do so, but he has very properly vented his concern, and I hope that it will have been heard on the Treasury Bench as well as it has been by me and by other hon. Members.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) just mentioned me by name, in a critical manner, for an action I apparently took as a Minister some years ago. I have no memory of the individual action, but I would like to confirm that I was given no advance notice that he was going to mention me by name. Can I have your confirmation that you would deprecate that behaviour in the Chamber?

Mr Speaker: I have just received advice on the matter, as the right hon. Gentleman was raising his point of order, and my response is as follows. First, I did not interpret what the right hon. Member for Tottenham said as being an accusation of dishonourable conduct. It was critical, but it was not an accusation of dishonourable conduct or the absence of integrity. Secondly—this is related to my first point—I think that the criticism was of the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) in his capacity as a Minister and the discharge of the duties that he held at that time. I do not think it was a criticism of him as a Member of the House.

In the name of the smooth running of this place, it is ordinarily desirable that Members should be as candid with each other as possible, and I would go so far as to say that it would have done no harm for the right hon. Member for Ashford to have been informed, but I am guided by procedural experts, and the Clerk is our most distinguished procedural expert. In narrow terms, was the right hon. Member for Tottenham guilty of an impropriety in that sense? No, he was not. That is, I think, the balanced and fair answer that I should give and have given to the right hon. Gentleman.

I thought that the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) was shifting in his seat as though he was about to raise a point of order, but obviously the point of order appetite has been satisfied, at least for now, which is very reassuring. We come now to the ten-minute rule motion, for which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) has been patiently waiting.

Health Impacts (Public Sector Duty)

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

12.57 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require public authorities to have regard to the need to consider physical and mental health impacts in the exercise of their functions; and for connected purposes.

This Bill is designed to bring a health in all policies approach to the making and delivery of all central and local government policies, and it has a simple aim: to improve the physical and mental health of our nation for generations to come.

The Roman statesman Cicero said that the health of the people shall be the supreme law. Down the centuries, when Governments have heeded his advice, they have performed great deeds: building great sewers and providing fresh water; cleaning up our food by banning contaminants; clearing slums and giving children safe spaces to play; cleansing our city air; vaccinating our children against killer diseases; banning smoking in public places; bringing in health and safety; protecting pedestrians against the dangers of traffic; introducing seatbelts; and, of course, creating our national health service, which delivers physical and mental health care at the point of need, irrespective of the ability to pay.

But we cannot rest on our laurels. New challenges and threats to our health and wellbeing arise in each generation. New responses are required, and that is what my Bill is all about. Hon. Members will have heard me speak about the mental health crisis we face in this country. That is not the only health crisis we face as a nation. We face a crisis of social care. We have a system that disproportionately focuses on treating people when they are in a crisis, already sick, rather than keeping our population well. We face an epidemic of loneliness among young as well as old. Tobacco remains a toxic killer. Too many cities and towns are blighted by substance misuse. A generation of children is facing obesity into adulthood. The technological revolution has an impact on our mental health and levels of physical activity. Cancer touches every family in Britain. Increasingly, our NHS is contending with lifestyle-related diseases.

The worst aspect of those major health challenges is the inequality in the ways they impact on people. This really is a social justice issue. Despite all the advances in our nation's health over the centuries, poor people suffer poorer health and live shorter lives than affluent people. Income is a determinant of health—what a terrible indictment of our society.

According to the Department of Health and Social Care's latest annual report, the health gap between rich and poor is widening. In 2010, life expectancy for men in England's most deprived areas was 9.1 years less than for those in the richest areas. By 2015, that figure had risen to 9.2 years. The equivalent gap for women also grew, from 6.8 to 7.1 years. Poorer people are more likely to spend 20 more years in ill health than richer people. They are more likely to suffer from strokes, cancer and heart attacks. They have less chance of gaining access to a GP or a dentist. We have seen an increase in hospital admissions for malnutrition and a

stalling in the improvement in life expectancy for the first time in 100 years. In modern Britain, a person's length of life, and the number of years they spend healthy, depends on their address and income. These inequalities exist for a range of other factors too, including likelihood of suffering a road traffic accident, likelihood of suffering a house fire, likelihood of being a victim of violent crime and likelihood of suffering mental ill health. Look at the locations of our food banks. Look at the epidemic of knife crime. Look at Grenfell Tower.

Inequality is a terrible scar on our society, so what is to be done? My Bill aims to place the physical and mental health of the population at the centre of all Government activity, beyond the confines of the Department of Health and Social Care and the responsibility of local authority directors of public health, so that no policy is developed or enacted without due consideration of its impact on health and, where possible, policies are designed actively to improve our wellbeing.

That is not a new approach. I would like to highlight the work of the all-party parliamentary group on health in all policies and its chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams). The World Health Organisation adopted a statement on this approach in Helsinki in 2013. It states:

"Health in All Policies is an approach to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the health implications of decisions, seeks synergies, and avoids harmful health impacts in order to improve population health and health equity. It improves accountability of policymakers for health impacts at all levels of policy-making. It includes an emphasis on the consequences of public policies on health systems, determinants of health and well-being."

Health in all policies has been adopted in Wales, through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which is designed

"to minimise any damage and increase any benefit"

from new policies. Wales joins Tasmania, Quebec and British Columbia in having statutory health impact assessments. Other countries are striving towards the same goal. Ecuador has its Plan Nacional para el buen vivir—the plan of good living. In Finland, the health in all policies approach has been part of governance for years. In Thailand, citizens have the right to request a health impact assessment if they feel that any proposal might be detrimental to their wellbeing.

Health in all policies means, for example, ensuring that the design of all buildings, estates and urban environments encourages walking, running, cycling, sharing and talking, and deters crime and vandalism. It means designing social security systems, including their assessments, that add to, rather than subtract from, people's sense of security, which enhances their physical and mental wellbeing because they know that the system is on their side.

Health in all policies means placing duties on food and drink manufacturers, shops and takeaways concerning the ingredients in their goods, pricing and the locations where they sell them, to discourage alcohol abuse and poor diets. It means designing services for young people and teenagers, new parents, people seeking work or the recently bereaved, so that services match needs. The creation of Sure Start centres was an example of this highly innovative approach. Indeed, given that we know how important the first 1,001 days of a child's life is,

and how what happens from conception to the age are two still determines an infant's life chances and their mental and physical health through childhood to adulthood, there is no better example of why we need a health in all policies approach in services for mums, dads and infants. This stretches way beyond childcare provision and health checks; it means looking again at patterns of work, income, benefits, parenting, education, food, housing, transport, air quality, playgrounds and many other areas of policy.

I acknowledge that we have seen some helpful steps forward in recent years, such as the introduction of a sugar tax and the banning of smoking in cars when children are present, but these are piecemeal and uncoordinated. My Bill represents a step change. It is not just about saving money for the national health service, although the approach would save resources, which is particularly important at a time when we know that our NHS and social care are under such pressure. It is also about what the King's Fund calls

"a cost-effective use of society's funds that reflects the value society puts on health and other goals."

The health in all policies duty could be placed on all public authorities, which would be further defined in the Bill to include Ministers of the Crown, Departments and local government, as outlined in schedule 19 to the Equality Act 2010. It would be backed by strong machinery within Government. It was a mistake for the coalition Government in 2012 to scrap the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Public Health, which might have served such a useful purpose, bringing together all those Departments across Government. Its remit was to enable the Secretary of State for Health to

"lead public health across central government"

and

"work across multiple departments to address the wider determinants of health."

In order to work, health in all policies will require a central driver that can range across Departments and agencies, with the full authority of No. 10, bringing people together, breaking down the walls of Jericho and creating real cross-Government working. No submission would appear in any red box without a thorough assessment of its impact on our nation's physical and mental health.

Lest some hon. Members feel that this is a licence for the nanny state, let me point to the so-called family test, supported by this Government and policed by the Cabinet

Sub-Committee on Social Justice, which requires all policies to be tested against their impact on family relationships and functioning. That is just one example. Governments assess the impact of policies all the time. Surely no impact is so important as the impact on our physical and mental wellbeing. We are told that Brexit affords us an opportunity to reshape our laws and regulations. No measure could have more positive benefit than the UK adopting a robust, full-throated approach to health in all policies.

I am grateful to colleagues from both sides of the House for their support. That includes more Members than I was allowed to include in the list of sponsors, so I will quickly reference them now. They are my hon. Friends the Members for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney), for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), for Halton (Derek Twigg), for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), for Stockport (Ann Coffey) and for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury), my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) and my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), for Warrington North (Helen Jones), for Stockton South (Dr Williams) and for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy).

The Bill would provide a platform for tackling the health inequalities that blight our communities and allowing more people to be fully engaged in maintaining their own health and wellbeing. It would be as solid a step forward as the restrictions on making and selling cheap gin in the 18th century, building the city sewers and delivering clean water in the 19th century, creating our NHS and the clean air Acts in the 20th century, or introducing the smoking ban in the 21st century. Health in all policies would be our legacy to future generations, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Luciana Berger, Debbie Abrahams, Dr Lisa Cameron, Rosie Cooper, Stella Creasy, Mr George Howarth, Diana Johnson, Norman Lamb, Johnny Mercer, Rachel Reeves, Andrew Selous and Dr Philippa Whitford present the Bill.

Luciana Berger accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October, and to be printed (Bill 198).

Opposition Day

9TH ALLOTTED DAY

School Funding

Mr Speaker: There have been some late withdrawals, but a not insignificant number of Members wish to speak in this debate. Therefore, although there is no time limit on Front-Bench speeches, I am sure that both the shadow Secretary of State and the Secretary of State will wish to tailor their contributions sensitively to take account of the fact that others wish to contribute.

1.8 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the Conservative Party manifesto pledge to make sure that no school has its budget cut as a result of the new national funding formula, the statement by the Secretary of State for Education that each school will see at least a small cash terms increase and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's guarantee that every school would receive a cash terms increase; endorses the aim of ensuring that there is a cash increase in every school's budget; agrees with the UK Statistics Authority that such an increase is not guaranteed by the national funding formula, which allows for reductions of up to 1.5 per cent in per pupil funding for schools; and calls on the Government to meet its guarantee, ensuring that every single school receives a cash increase in per pupil funding in every financial year of the 2017 Parliament.

The last time I moved an Opposition day motion, I know I upset the Government. With the support of every party except theirs, our motion rejecting the regulations that increased tuition fees was passed by the House. After that, the Government announced that they would no longer vote on Opposition days. Today, they should find our motion more helpful.

As I suspect Members on both sides of the House know all too well, the Conservative party lost hundreds of thousands of votes at the general election due to its school cuts. With another polling day coming up, I have decided to extend an olive branch. Today's motion is extremely modest. It does not even call on the Government to commit to Labour's spending plans. It simply asks Government Members to implement the commitment in their own manifesto and support the positions of the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Education.

In January, the Secretary of State told us at the Dispatch Box that every school

"will see at least a small cash increase."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 536.]

Then, during the spring statement, the Chancellor told the House that the Government had given a

"guarantee that every school would receive a cash-terms increase."—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2018; Vol. 637, c. 742.]

He reiterated: "That guarantee stands today." There was one problem: that guarantee did not exist.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Brampton Primary School in Chesterfield got in touch with me on Friday to say it has had a £130,000 budget reduction this year. That school has one of the few autism units in the area. Spending on special needs has been halved. The most vulnerable pupils in the schools that most desperately need funding are the victims of that broken Tory promise.

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree. That is one of the travesties of this issue. Many parents up and down the country are angry and upset, particularly parents of children with high needs and special educational needs. They feel let down by this Government and their broken promises.

When the Institute for Fiscal Studies heard what the Secretary of State said about a cash-terms increase, it responded: "This is not true." When I raised the matter with the UK Statistics Authority, it too said that the claim was not, as it stood, accurate. The fact is that the national funding formula does not guarantee every school a cash increase per pupil. In fact, it permits a cut.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Out of 103 schools in Coventry, 102 will face cuts. Put another way, over the next two or three years, education in Coventry will face cuts of just under £14 million. Put yet another way, there will be cuts of £249 per pupil. Is that not disgraceful? Is it not terrible for a party to entice people to vote for it through a manifesto, then cut their throats?

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. I remember visiting his constituency and seeing the fantastic work that teachers and support staff do in his area. I commend their work, but I say again that the Government have to listen to teachers and parents up and down the country who say that enough is enough and that the cuts to their budgets are not acceptable.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Does the hon. Lady acknowledge that the IFS also said that the extra £1.3 billion for schools means that school spending will not fall but stay the same per pupil?

Angela Rayner: It is interesting that the hon. Lady says that. That may be the case from today onwards, but that £1.3 billion figure takes no account of the £2.7 billion that her Government have already taken from schools, so they still face cash cuts between 2015 and 2020. Our motion offers the Government the support of the House to change that and to put their own words into practice.

Schools increasingly face an environment that is completely unacceptable in a country like ours. Earlier this month, teachers warned of a growing child poverty crisis. Staff said that children were coming into school without clean clothes. We even heard that pupils were showing signs of malnutrition. I doubt that anyone—in this place or outside—thought they would read headlines like that in 2018, but every part of our children's education system is experiencing a funding squeeze.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned malnutrition. Does she acknowledge that it took a Conservative-led Government to introduce the free schools programme and invest £26 million in a nutritional breakfasts programme to help young people? Surely she would welcome that.

Angela Rayner: If the hon. Lady casts her mind back, she will remember that at the general election her Government offered school breakfasts at 6p a breakfast. I do not know how they thought they could feed children for 6p a breakfast. I will take no lectures from

Government Members given that, after six months, the Government still do not have a chair for their Social Mobility Commission.

Our motion offers the Government the support of the House to change that and to put their words into practice. Earlier this month, teachers warned of a growing child poverty crisis. The Government should support children and their families from the beginning of their lives, but funding for Sure Start has been slashed by hundreds of millions of pounds and 1,200 Sure Start centres have been lost since the Tories came to power. School funding cuts have left more children crammed into super-size classes, there are fewer subjects on offer and the school day has even been squeezed.

Maria Caulfield: Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Angela Rayner: No, I have already given way to the hon. Lady.

The NASUWT warned just weeks ago that one in five new classrooms is a portakabin. Is it not time for the Government to match our commitment to getting the school estate into a safe and acceptable condition?

For kids with special educational needs, the funding crisis creates even greater challenges. Let me declare an interest: only last week, I was one of those parents facing the issue of making transitional arrangements for their child with special educational needs. Frankly, parents up and down the country worry that support will not be in place for their children. When school budgets are cut, the services that support children who are most in need are often lost first. The National Education Union found that almost two thirds of schools have had to cut special needs provision.

The Government's new funding formula presents local authorities, which are at breaking point due to cuts to their budgets, with the terrible choice between top-slicing additional funding for high needs and giving schools their full allocation. Councils should never have to face that choice. Will the Secretary of State look at giving every local authority the additional funding they need for high needs from his Department's budget instead of squeezing it from schools, which are already under pressure?

There is a similar picture for other support. We recently debated the new rules on free school-meal eligibility. Despite Ministers and Government Members claiming that no children would lose their existing allowance, the IFS found that one in eight who is child eligible under the legacy benefits system will not be eligible after the changes. Will the Secretary of State finally publish his Department's methodology?

At 16, children should have new opportunities ahead of them, but too often those are lost. Some £1.2 billion has been slashed from the 16-to-19 education budget, hitting sixth forms and colleges. Apprenticeship starts are in freefall. This Government's repeated failure to invest in our young people and their futures will rob them of the opportunities that so many of us in the Chamber took for granted.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will remind us all of the £1.3 billion his predecessor eventually came up with last year, so perhaps he will also tell us where that money will come from. We already know that £300 million was raided from the healthy pupils fund despite the

Government's promise that that would not be cut. His predecessor also indicated that she would save money by rowing back on the free schools programme—at last, an admission that conventional schools are actually cheaper.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): The Tories have cut £2.7 billion from the schools budget in England since 2015. Does my hon. Friend agree that the extra £1.3 billion of schools funding that the Government announced in July comes nowhere near plugging the funding gap?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend makes a crucial point, which relates to the point made by the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield). Taking £1.3 billion from the existing education budget does nothing to mitigate the £2.7 billion of cuts that schools have faced.

Will the Secretary of State tell us how many new schools will now be built by local authorities and how much money will be saved?

The rest of the cuts come from mysterious efficiency savings, which the Secretary of State's predecessor said would be identified by officials. Have those savings been identified and can he share that information with the House today? Will he admit that the £1.3 billion will not reverse the loss of the £2.7 billion from school budgets, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) reiterated?

Money is not the only factor, but it is hard to escape the reality that the cuts are the fundamental fact of life facing those who run our public services and those who rely on them. Can the Secretary of State tell us exactly how many schools will face a cash-terms cut to their budget in the next year?

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Local parents in my constituency have formed a group called Fair Funding Enfield, which recently contacted schools to see what effect the current funding arrangements are having on them. Of the 59 schools that responded, 49% said they had cut teaching staff, 76% that they had cut teaching assistants, 72% that they had cut learning resources, 32% that they had cut school trips, 95% that the cuts would negatively impact the quality of education being delivered and 42% that they had requested or were considering requesting financial contributions from parents. Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite statements to the contrary from the Government, our schools are in financial crisis and in urgent need of proper funding?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I commend the work he is doing across his constituency and the work that Fair Funding Enfield and other parents' groups are doing on this issue. Alongside the unions, such groups have tried to push the issue up the agenda. I also pay tribute to the work of the Select Committee on Education and hon. Members across the House who have raised this issue continuously. I hope that the Government take heed of that today.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Will the hon. Lady also pay tribute to the Minister for School Standards, who has listened carefully to headteachers in my constituency who came to see him about the new funding formula? They have received an increase from £4,100-odd

[Fiona Bruce]

to £4,800 per pupil per year for their schools. Is it not right to acknowledge that the Schools Minister has listened and acted accordingly?

Angela Rayner: I did commend the work of hon. Members across the House to push this issue forward with the Government. The Government have to understand that their manifesto made the commitment that there would be no cuts in cash terms, yet the IFS has already said that there will potentially be cuts of 1.5% to schools. Today's motion is about holding the Government to account for their promises at the last general election.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned cash terms, but spending per pupil under this Government in 2019-20 will be 50% higher in real terms than under Labour in 2000-01. When she talks about cuts, will she look at the evidence and at the real-terms effect of this policy?

Angela Rayner: I say to Government Members that the evidence is clear. Under the last Labour Government, there was a 70% per pupil increase in school budgets. Since 2015, schools have faced cuts. We have heard that time and again from media reports, teachers, parents and leaders of councils of all political persuasions. All of them have said that these cuts are having a detrimental effect. If Government Members want to stick their heads in the sand, that is up to them, but we are trying to hold the Government to account for their promise to give a cash increase to all schools.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): To give an example of the cuts that education faces, does my hon. Friend agree that the cuts to the music service in Conservative-controlled East Sussex, which covers my constituency, are a real danger? The Conservative council is proposing to cut the music service in Brighton and Hove because it cannot afford it. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) is chuntering away. In Brighton, 40% of the schools have had to cut mental health services because they cannot afford them any more. Those are real cuts that are harming real children.

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend makes a crucial point. Arts and culture are suffering under this Government. All children across the country should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument at school. Under Labour, they would get that opportunity.

David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con) *rose—*

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con) *rose—*

Angela Rayner: I will make a bit more progress.

What requests has the Secretary of State received from local authorities that cash cuts hitting face their schools and what has his response been? How much additional funding would be needed to meet the shortfall? That is all we are asking for in the motion. We are not asking the Secretary of State to match Labour's commitment to increase per pupil funding each and every year to restore the funding lost since 2015. We are

asking only that he is true to what he has promised in this House and ensures that not a single school faces a cash-terms cut next year.

Luckily for the Secretary of State, the Chancellor has given schools across the country the same guarantee. Will he give us the commitment here today that he will go to the Chancellor and ask for the funding to meet that guarantee? Even he has to acknowledge the reality.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Thinking of the future, whichever side we were on in the Brexit debate, this country will face real challenges. We must upskill like we have never done before if we are to compete. If nothing else, that is one dashed good reason for investing in our young people and in education.

Angela Rayner: The hon. Gentleman touches on an important point. When I was speaking to my constituents in Ashton-under-Lyne, who voted overwhelmingly to leave the EU, one of their frustrations was that they felt their children had not been given opportunities and had been left behind. How will they feel when the schools in my constituency face these cost pressures and cuts? The Government have to listen to people across this country who feel left behind and as if their children are not being treated fairly by this Government.

Only a few months ago, the Secretary of State said at the Association of School and College Leaders conference:

"It has been tough, funding is tight, I don't deny that at all."

The fact he recognises the problem is welcome, but action is always better than words.

David Evennett: I am listening with great interest to the hon. Lady's peroration. She has quoted the IFS, but since 2010 the core schools budget has been protected in real terms and we are protecting per pupil spending until 2020. Surely she should recognise that as well.

Angela Rayner: The right hon. Gentleman and I have worked well together across the Dispatch Box at times, but however we cut the figures from the IFS, our schools still face cuts. That is what the motion is about: it is about the commitment that the Government and the Conservative party made at the last general election. I hope to see many Members from across the House supporting the motion, because all we ask is that the commitment that was made at the general election is fulfilled and the promise kept.

The same is true of pay. The Chancellor promised to lift the pay cap after seven years of real-terms pay cuts left support staff £3,000 a year and teachers £5,000 a year worse off. Only this week, I was at Unison's conference meeting support staff at the frontline of our public services. Along with teachers, they are essential to our schools and the children they serve, yet nearly one in 10 teaching assistants was lost between 2013 and 2017. Too many are now living on poverty pay. The GMB union found that three quarters of apprentice teaching assistants were on £3.50 an hour, yet the Office for Budget Responsibility has warned that without new funding for pay, there will be cuts in other education spending or to the workforce. The Government's own pay review body has warned that

"some schools will find it challenging to implement any pay uplift at all."

Does the Secretary of State agree? Has he assessed the gap in funding, and how will he ensure that we can recruit and retain the teachers and vital support staff that we need without yet more cuts?

As I outlined at the beginning of my speech, Government Members have developed a habit of abstaining on all Opposition day motions, but today, I hope that we have offered them something different: a motion that they can actually vote for, because this motion does not ask them to do anything but follow the lead of their Ministers. They have repeatedly promised that all schools will get a cash-terms funding increase and have then failed to deliver it. The Education Secretary recently told us that “the mere repetition of a falsehood does not turn it into the truth.”—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2018; Vol. 637, c. 801.]

I hope that his promises were indeed the truth.

The Government have given a guarantee that not a single school will face a cash-terms cut to its budget. If that guarantee stands, there is no reason Government Members should not join me in the Aye Lobby after this debate. Our children deserve the best education in the world and our teaching staff need the resources to do their job, so I ask all Members across the House to commit to the promises made at the election. I commend the motion to the House.

1.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds):

I start on a note of agreement with the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner): it is a moral imperative to strive for the very best for the next generation in our country and education plays the most central role in that quest. That is what the 450,000 teachers in English schools are dedicated to and what we are dedicated to supporting them in. To achieve that takes many things, but high on the list of course is money. There is more money going into our schools than ever before—rising from almost £41 billion last year to £42.4 billion this year and then rising again to £43.5 billion next year. That includes the additional £1.3 billion, to which she referred, that we are directing to frontline spending by prioritising money from elsewhere in the Department for Education’s budget, as my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), announced in July last year. That means that overall we are protecting schools’ per pupil funding in real terms over the next two years.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Opposition’s motion notes the Conservative party’s pledge that no school would receive cuts to their funding. That is not correct because, in Bolton South East, a number of schools are being affected and the budget is being reduced. If he does not accept that, I invite him to Bolton South East to meet the headteachers of my schools, who have said that there has been a real cut to their budget.

Damian Hinds: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and I will of course come to the specifics of the Opposition’s motion and the important points about the funding formula.

We are also giving primary schools £320 million a year for PE and sport—double what was given in 2016—and investing £600 million a year to provide free school meals for all infants. That is on top of our substantial investment in school improvement activities. This year,

we will invest over £60 million in maths, science and computing, and over £100 million—to respond partly to the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle)—in arts and music.

Spending is high by historical standards. The independent Institute for Fiscal Studies—this has come up already—has shown that, in real terms, per pupil funding in 2020 will be at least half as much again as it was in 2000. Looking internationally, we spend more on our schools in total than both the EU and OECD averages and at levels comparable with key competitor countries.

However, although it is true that overall spend is higher—this goes to the point made by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), the sole, or primary Liberal Democrat representative with us here today—on technical and vocational education, our figures compare less favourably. In Germany in particular, the spend is considerably more than ours on secondary-level vocational programmes. That is why I am so pleased that the Chancellor has committed extra money to boost the size and funding for the new T-level programmes. That will total over £500 million a year in additional resources for post-16 education when T-levels are fully rolled out.

As well as ensuring record funding for our schools, the Government have taken on the historical challenge of introducing a fair national funding formula—something, of course, that has not been taken on by any previous Government—to ensure that money is directed where it is most needed, based on the individual characteristics of schools and pupils, not on accidents of history or geography.

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Damian Hinds: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not. We have gone further than our manifesto promise that no school would lose funding as a result of the national funding formula. The formula is in fact giving every local authority more money for every pupil in every school in 2018-19 and 2019-20. Every school is attracting at least a cash increase of 0.5% per pupil through the formula this year, and 1% more next year, compared with their baselines.

Of course, we have always been clear that local authorities continue to have some flexibility on how this funding is distributed across schools in their local area. I think that is right and it is a good thing that the flexibility exists for local authorities as we transition into the national funding formula. As our extensive consultation showed, flexibility is important because it allows local authorities, in consultation with their schools, to reflect local need and to smooth the transition toward the NFF where this represents a significant change.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that although in my area we have achieved above average results with some of the lowest amounts of per pupil funding anywhere in the country, we are now at the point where it is simply too little? Will he please have some urgency in getting us a bit closer to the average because we simply do not have enough?

Damian Hinds: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his intervention. As well as ensuring that every school attracts more money, the national funding formula also allocates the biggest increases to schools that have

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historically been the most underfunded. Thousands of schools will attract 3% more per pupil this year and another 3% per pupil next year, and some of the lowest-funded schools will attract even more as a result of our minimum per pupil funding levels, which mean that every primary school will attract £3,500 per pupil and every secondary school £4,800 per pupil by 2019-20. As a result, many areas will see quite big increases across the board. For example, by 2019-20 in Knowsley, there will be an increase of 4.3%, and in Derby there will be an increase of 6.7% in the same timeframe. In York, there will be an increase of 7.9%, and in Bath and North East Somerset, an increase of 7.2%.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): As someone who has supported the national funding formula through the f40 group for a long time, I am grateful that this has now been brought to fruition. The problem is that the way in which the formula is being operated in my area, with the conflation of special needs within the base budget, is causing significant problems among some schools. Will the Secretary of State look at how that special needs allocation is operating to ensure that the poorer schools do not get even poorer, relatively?

Damian Hinds: The hon. Gentleman raises important points about the high needs block. As I was saying, it is right that there is some flexibility at local authority level. Local authorities have the most up-to-date figures and profiling of the children in their areas, in terms of special educational needs and so on. Protections also apply to the high needs block through the minimum guarantees and so on, while overall high needs funding has of course gone up.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The Secretary of State talks about flexibility within local authority budgets. I have to say, as someone who is about to leave the London Borough of Redbridge this May, that he is in cloud cuckoo land. There is no flexibility in children's services departments; there is just consistent need and insufficient funding. Parents do not need the UK Statistics Authority to show that some schools face budget cuts. They have seen it for themselves in cuts to the curriculum, a lack of adequate support for children with special educational needs and demands for money from parents to fund basics and materials. Does he understand that, when he stands at that Dispatch Box and talks about the figures as if everything is rosy, the parents know it is a load of rubbish because they are seeing it for themselves in their and their children's lived experience?

Damian Hinds: The funding formula is what it is and has its guaranteed allocations of money from central funding to local authorities in respect of each school, along the lines I have outlined. I recognise, however, that schools have faced significant cost pressures over recent years—the hon. Gentleman alluded to some of those and their effects—in respect of national insurance and pension contributions, for example. There are new costs as well. For example, spending on technology exceeded £500 million across the system in 2016.

I also realise that there can be particular pressures on high needs budgets, as schools and local authorities work as hard as they can to provide an excellent education for every child, including those facing the greatest challenges.

As I was saying, funding for high needs has benefited from the same protections we have been able to provide for mainstream schools, but I recognise that schools now do more to support pupils with a complex range of social, emotional and behavioural needs.

We are redoubling our efforts to help schools to get the best value from their resources, through free procurement advice via our pilot buying hubs in the north-west and south-west, which provide face-to-face and phone advice to schools on complex procurement and on how to get the best value for money; through nationally negotiated purchasing deals; and through school resource management advisers—business management experts from within the sector providing hands-on support to the schools that most need our help.

John Redwood: I welcome what the Secretary of State has said about minimum levels. I have shared the figures from my local authority with the Minister for School Standards. I have primary schools receiving less than £3,500 per pupil and secondary schools receiving less than £4,600 per pupil. When can I tell them they will be brought up?

Damian Hinds: I will write to my right hon. Friend with the specific figures for his schools. The formula is there both to create a guaranteed minimum level and to make sure that the schools that have historically been most underfunded see the greatest increases.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): After decades of underfunding, schools in my constituency are benefiting from a 6% increase per pupil over the next two years. Parents and pupils in my constituency will be glad to hear that, but can the Secretary of State reassure me that this will not just be a two-year process but that we will continue to move towards fairness afterwards and that he will press for a settlement in the next spending review that allows us to make quick progress towards greater fairness?

Damian Hinds: It is clearly essential, as several colleagues from across the House have said, that our education system be properly funded. In an increasingly competitive world, it is important that we live up to that challenge and make sure that all children can be properly fulfilled and reach their potential. On future funding, there is a comprehensive spending review process, with which my hon. Friend is well familiar from his days at Her Majesty's Treasury. We have set out in the national funding formula what will happen over the two-year period and established the principle that funding should be fair.

It is right that we have the highest ever total cash funding going into our schools. The kind of practical support I have just outlined is also a key priority for me because it is not just the total funding that matters but how far it can go in achieving the objectives we all share, which is incredibly important. Our reforms in schools are paying dividends thanks to the hard work of teachers, our continued focus on raising standards and the emphasis on phonics. Over 150,000 more six-year-olds are now on track to become fluent readers than in 2012, our top pupils are among the world's best readers, and GCSEs and A-levels rank among the world's best qualifications.

There can be no great schools without great teachers—to motivate children, make knowledge meaningful and inspire curiosity. The quality of teaching matters more

than anything else, and it matters most of all for the most disadvantaged children. Right now we have many brilliant teachers in our schools—it is the best generation of teachers yet—and my top priority is to make sure that teaching remains an attractive and fulfilling profession. I am clear that we need to get back to the essence of successful teaching, which means stripping away the workload that does not add value and giving teachers the time and space to focus on what actually matters, in the interests of teachers and, of course, children.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State tell us where Portsmouth schools should be making savings, given that they are already having to make ongoing cuts? Should they cut teachers, have even bigger class sizes, shorten the school day? Parents and teachers in my constituency deserve better.

Damian Hinds: What I was outlining, on the issue of trying to give more support to schools on managing resources, is that it is all about ensuring that money can be devoted to the frontline to maximise the amount of great teaching from great teachers. I know that teachers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency will be as focused on that as teachers in constituencies throughout the country.

Toby Perkins: I want to help the Secretary of State make good on his promise. He made a commitment that no school will see a cut in funding. What is the strength of that guarantee? If it turns out that a school has had a reduction in funding, will he consider it a resignation matter?

Damian Hinds: I think the hon. Gentleman has been here from the beginning of the debate, so, unless he was reading something, he will have heard me set out how the national funding formula works. It allocates money—

Toby Perkins: If what he said—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he cannot conduct the debate from a sedentary position. Perhaps the Secretary of State will give way again later, but he must let him finish answering the question he has just asked.

Damian Hinds: The formula allocates money to each school, subject to set minimum cash increases, but there is flexibility for local authorities—which have the most-up-to-date information on the profiles of children in their schools, in terms of special needs, free school meals and so on—to reallocate money up to certain limits. I think that is right. Does the hon. Gentleman think it is wrong that they have that flexibility?

Toby Perkins: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for asking the question. Is he guaranteeing that no school will lose money? Is that his commitment? If there is no such commitment, he should say so, and if there is, he should not hide behind councils.

Damian Hinds: The hon. Gentleman is repeating what he just said. The national funding formula allocates money in respect of every school. It then goes to the local authority, which has a certain amount of discretion to reallocate that money between different schools up to a certain limit to ensure that the funding goes to the places where it is most needed.

Jeremy Quin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. I did not want to interrupt his conversation with the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins).

While I, and many other Conservative Members, may have individual issues about individual schools or how the funding formula might work out in practice in certain circumstances, I welcome the principle—which was agreed by Labour Members—of a fair funding formula that is allocating more money where it is required. It is going to pupils on the basis of need, and that is something that we should all support.

Damian Hinds: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. It is a historic challenge to have taken on, and it is not without its difficulties, but it is right to ensure that funding goes where it is most needed, not according to the way in which various funding settlements have accumulated over the years in different areas on the basis of accidents of history and geography.

I had better make some progress towards the conclusion of my speech, Madam Deputy Speaker, because otherwise you will do it for me. We have the best-qualified teachers we have ever had, backed up by the largest amount of money that we have ever had in the schools budget. We are protecting schools' per pupil funding in real terms over the next two years, at a time when pupil numbers are rising. Working alongside a brilliant set of teachers and other education professionals, we are striving for a world-class education for everyone, whatever their background.

Since 2010, the Government have helped more children to go to good schools. We have helped primary school children to become better readers, we have helped secondary school children to gain higher-quality qualifications, and we have helped more students than ever to go on to university. We have extended early years education so that more children are school-ready, and we have raised the participation age so that everyone can build up the education and skills that they need for life. Through academies and free schools, we have given our frontline professionals, local communities and parents more freedom and choice. We have invested and are investing—with £7 billion committed in a six-year period—to create the quality of extra school places that we need, and let me repeat that more revenue funding is going into our schools than ever before.

The benefits of our reforms can be seen in schools up and down the country, thanks, of course, to the hard work and dedication of our teachers and education professionals. In its most recent annual report, published in December last year, Ofsted stated that

“the quality of education and care provided to young people today is better than ever.”

Since 2010, we have increased the number of children in good and outstanding schools by 1.9 million. The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has narrowed by 10%, and 95% of three and four-year-olds are benefiting from early years education. We have introduced the pupil premium and have extended free school meals to further education colleges and 50,000 more schoolchildren, as well as introducing universal infant free school meals.

However, the job is far from done. We are ambitious for all our schools, and for all our children. Someone's background does not dictate their talents, and it should

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not limit their dreams. The attainment gap between children from different backgrounds has narrowed, but it is still too wide, so we are continuing our commitment to the pupil premium and the opportunity areas programme. Some places have seen dramatic gains, but others still need extra assistance. We must spread opportunity to the parts of the country where children are still let down by the limited depth and breadth of the education that is available. Every child should be able to go to a great school, which is why we are putting more than £300 million into support programmes over the next two years. To ensure that our economy has the skills that it needs to be fit for the future, we will do more to encourage the take-up of science, technology, engineering and maths by, for instance, introducing the maths premium and teacher bursaries for priority subjects.

By improving our nurseries, schools, colleges and universities, we can build a society in which it does not matter who people are, where they live or who they know. Alongside school leaders, governors, teachers, parents and pupils, we are striving for a world-class education for everyone, whatever their background, so that we can make our economy fit for the future in a world of rapid technological change. We want to boost our productivity and our children's future prosperity, so that they are better equipped for their own futures and more of them can achieve their potential and lead fulfilled lives. That is what a world-class education can bring and that is what we are working for.

1.54 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I must first declare an interest. My wife is the cabinet member for children and young people in Cheshire West and Chester, my local authority—and what a good job she does!—and two of my children attend a local school that is affected by the funding issues that we are discussing today.

A central promise in the 2017 manifesto on which every Conservative Member stood was

“we will make sure that no school has its budget cut as a result of the new formula.”

As we heard today from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), the Conservatives' promise has been augmented in recent months by subsequent statements from Cabinet Ministers about cash increases for every school, but that is not what we are told is happening on the ground. All but one of the schools in my constituency face a funding cut; local schools will lose about £3 million between 2015 and 2019.

Toby Perkins: It is true that we are being told by schools that there is a real-terms cut. Was my hon. Friend as alarmed as I was by the fact that, even in the Chamber, the Secretary of State was unwilling to offer the guarantee that no school would lose money?

Justin Madders: Yes, I was alarmed, because I think it is clear from all the information that Members have received—and they are hearing from schools, heads and parents every day—that a real crisis is here now, and will get worse over the next few years. There is a very

clear difference of opinion, but I know who I think has the real information: the people who are actually doing the day-to-day job.

The figures that I have seen suggest that pupils in my constituency will receive £300 per head less over the next three or four years. The situation is at breaking point. I know from talking to parents, teachers and heads that schools are already facing very tough choices. One headteacher told me:

“I believe that as a school we will also have to reduce the number of extra activities we offer pupils...fewer clubs, fewer arts days, fewer visits and visitors to school. ‘Balancing the books’ has become one of the worst aspects of my job. Begging letters to parents for equipment, repairs and resources are common in some schools. I feel that class sizes will increase and the curriculum will be pared back to the basics. To put it bluntly—children will be the losers.”

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend chairs the all-party parliamentary group on social mobility, so he will know that many of the vital extra-curricular activities that are being reduced are crucial to giving children from less advantaged backgrounds the experiences and opportunities that those from the most advantaged backgrounds receive by virtue of their wealth. Does it not say everything about this Government's commitment to social mobility and tackling educational inequality that they cannot even appoint an adviser on social mobility, let alone deliver the policies in practice?

Justin Madders: I think that my hon. Friend must have read my speech, because I was going to make exactly that point. It is worth reminding Members that the previous chair of the Social Mobility Commission, Alan Milburn, resigned in November. That was a damning indictment of the state of social mobility in this country and the Government's record on it, yet here we are, nearly six months on, and little if anything seems to have been done to try to redress that.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: many of those extra-curricular activities—the soft skills, information, advice and support that children are given outside the classroom environment—are vital to building up skills that will help them to progress and make the most of their life chances.

I hear school heads saying that they are going to have to send begging letters, and my constituents are not wealthy people. They cannot really afford to pay any extra for their children's schools. They are anxious to help in any way that they can, but they do not have the spare cash. It makes me ashamed that in this country we are reduced to having to send letters to parents who work hard and already pay their taxes.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): We have encountered this very issue in Reading. A particular problem in many areas is the loss of a large number of skilled teachers with years of experience in the profession. I have written to the Secretary of State about that. Does my hon. Friend agree that the loss of highly skilled and highly experienced teachers with many years of service is a specific issue which should be addressed by the Department?

Justin Madders: Yes, it is concerning. As we know, in any organisation seeking to balance the books—and schools are no different—the more experienced and more expensive staff are often the ones encouraged to

perhaps take early retirement or redundancy. The replacement staff, if there are any, are often at the lower end of the pay spectrum—not that they are any lesser people for that, but they do not have the skills and experience that justify being in a higher pay bracket.

The cuts to school funding extend to council support. Changes to central support grants will lead to about half a million pounds being lost to my local authority in the next decade, which will further emasculate its already strangled ability to support schools. Not that it can help most of them even if it wanted to, thanks to the acceleration of the academies programme.

Faisal Rashid: Under the new system, Warrington will have among the worst funded schools—141st out of 150—and could also lose just under £2,500 per child. Clearly, the system is not fit for purpose or balanced across the country. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should ensure that the fair funding formula is just that: fair?

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Hon. Members are making points about the situations in their constituencies, and I want to talk about the ludicrous situation facing one of the academies in my constituency. It was placed in special measures last year, but has had to wait over six months to get any financial support from the Department to help it to improve. In the past, the local authority would have stepped in the next day—it would probably have been helping all along—but now the academy is required to go through a lengthy application process, which delays progress. Six months in a failing school is six months too long, and the lack of progress, which has been visible to the local community, has long-term implications for the school's viability. Because of its situation, the roll is now falling. In fact, the school faces a double whammy of funding losses, which will only exacerbate an already extremely challenging situation.

The net result is that the other schools in my constituency end up being over-subscribed. The chaos of an academy-led admissions system means that some parents end up feeling that they have nowhere to send their children to. That is quite a dramatic statement, but that is how many parents feel and it represents an absolute failure by the state. The prospects of the situation remedying itself any time soon look bleak. If we were truly following the market-led approach that the Government appear to be advocating, the successful schools in my constituency that can attract more pupils would be allowed to expand, but there is precious little funding available for them to do that.

One example of a school in my constituency that has turned round and been a success story is Ellesmere Port Catholic High School, which has seen huge improvements after it was placed in special measures in November 2013. The headteacher and the school have worked exceptionally hard to turn things round, and in June 2015 it was officially rated by Ofsted as good. So impressive has the school's improvement been that the chief inspector of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw, referred to it in a speech about schools making remarkable transformations, saying:

“At Ellesmere Port Catholic High School, only a third of pupils achieved 5 good GCSEs. Now almost three-quarters do.”

I am pleased to say that this year the school has had full admissions for its year 7 pupils. These improvements should be applauded, as they have been by Sir Michael Wilshaw, but how is the school rewarded? With a budget scenario that envisages staffing cuts.

The school tells me that it desperately needs to expand as a result of its progress, but where is the capital funding that it needs to help to achieve that aim? How can it build on its success when it is not allowed to build? I am sure that if it reopened as a free school, there would be no problem getting the cash needed, but why does it need to reinvent the wheel? Why are existing schools that have put the effort in and that made great improvements and are already an established part of the community discriminated against because they are not part of the latest Government fad? How about a capital funding policy that rewards improvement and looks at where existing provision can be augmented? Indeed, we can contrast that with a story I read yesterday about a brand new free school in Plymouth that cost £4.2 million to set up, but which has closed after just 16 months. How can money be thrown down the drain on experiments like that when existing good schools cannot expand?

Education is at a tipping point in this country. We know from a National Education Union survey that 55% of schools that responded said that class sizes had risen in the last year and that over three quarters reported cuts in spending on books and equipment.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Class sizes have risen in 80% of the secondary schools in my constituency since 2014. Every secondary school in my constituency has had to cut staff in the same timeframe. Does my hon. Friend agree that cuts to school budgets are responsible for that?

Justin Madders: I think there is a clear correlation, and at the next election we may go back to what we said about class sizes on our 1997 pledge cards. It certainly resonated then, and I think it will again.

The National Education Union survey also showed that two thirds of schools had reported cuts in special educational needs provision. I know from my surgery appointments how anxious and distressed parents feel if there is a delay in agreeing an education, health and care plan or if they feel it is not being delivered in full because the school faces funding pressures elsewhere. The situation is distressing, and it is difficult to see it improving any time soon. As we know, nationally there are about 4,500 children and young people still waiting for their statements to be put into practice.

We are at a tipping point. Schools are already reporting extremely difficult situations. They are already having to make choices that under ordinary circumstances we would consider completely unacceptable, but they now face three or four years of even more funding cuts. If we cannot invest in our children's future, we cannot invest in ourselves.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, let me say that I hope we can manage without a formal time limit this afternoon, because the debate flows much more easily without one. If hon. Members stick to around

[*Madam Deputy Speaker*]

nine minutes each—and if you cannot say it in nine minutes, it is probably not worth saying—[*Interruption.*] Yes, it is a challenge. I challenge hon. Members to say it in nine minutes, and if that does not happen, I will have to impose a time limit.

2.7 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): One thing is certain: thanks to dedicated staff and reforms, educational standards have been rising. I have been visiting schools and colleges in my constituency for almost 18 years, as a candidate and an MP, and I am convinced that the quality of education, particularly in English and maths, has improved greatly. The teaching of phonics in particular has played a role in improving literacy, and I pay tribute to the Minister and others on the Front Bench for ensuring that it is a key part of our curriculum.

However, it is not clear that that improvement can be sustained in the face of rising pressures on schools. Our education system faces a number of major challenges, the first being resources. Despite steady investment in the English education system over the last 20 years and record overall levels of public money going into schools—it is important to get that on the record—there are rising cost pressures, which lead to serious challenges to the delivery of high-quality education for all our children.

Last Thursday, the Education Committee announced a new inquiry into school and college funding ahead of the next spending review—I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker), a member of our Committee, in the Chamber. It is our hope that a forward-looking inquiry will move beyond the exchanges here and elsewhere, which have largely taken place at cross purposes and to little effect, and inevitably take on a party political tinge. The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), whom I admire greatly, said it was clear that this debate was linked to the local elections.

The Government have rightly chosen to protect overall education funding. Let us look, however, at what the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has done. He has made the case for increasing funding for the NHS, supported by the chief executive of NHS England. We need the same level of vocal support for our schools and colleges, and a similar long-term vision. The key figure to bear in mind is real-terms per-pupil expenditure. After all, it is the experience of individual students that matters, and I hope that our inquiry will give them the opportunity to inform and influence the spending review. My right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) should be commended for redirecting money from the Department to the frontline of schools, but the time has come to seriously rethink the way in which we fund schools and colleges and to adopt a much more long-term perspective. I have suggested 10 years as a starting point—as is being talked about for the NHS—because it is clear that making a decision every three to four years is just not strategic enough.

The second challenge that schools are facing is the workforce. Becoming a teacher is a special and remarkable career choice, and more should be done to celebrate the contribution of the teaching profession. Many Members will have seen the Department's public campaigns designed

to attract new entrants to the profession, and will know of the financial support available through bursaries. However, the National Audit Office found last year that whereas £555 million was spent on training and supporting new teachers in 2013-14, the Department for Education spent just £35.7 million in 2016-17 on programmes for teacher development and retention, of which just £91,000 was aimed at improving teacher retention.

It is widely acknowledged that retention is just as important as recruitment, but far too many teachers leave the profession when in other circumstances they could stay. In 2016, Policy Exchange published research showing that a quarter of teachers leaving the classroom were women aged between 30 and 39. This is a challenge for productivity and for social justice, and schools will need to become much more open to part-time and flexible working in order to stop the classroom brain drain.

The third challenge involves improving social justice in our school system; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned that earlier. This goes beyond just increasing public investment and strengthening the teaching workforce, because there are still great social injustices in our education system. Just 1.3% of children taught outside mainstream settings get five good GCSEs. I know that the Schools Minister is passionate about GCSEs, so why is this group of children being neglected in this way? Only a third of children receiving free school meals get five good GCSEs, compared with 61% of their better-off peers.

We must act to remove the built-in injustices and anachronisms, such as the favourable conditions under which the independent school sector operates. I have previously challenged the advantaged and entitled nature of many private schools. I fully acknowledge that I was proud to go to one; my father came here as an immigrant and wanted to send me to such a school. However, I believe that, given the charitable status benefits that they enjoy, there should be a levy on private schools similar to the apprenticeship levy, to ensure that we give the very poorest children in our country the chance to access and climb the private school ladder.

The fourth challenge concerns the curriculum. We face real challenges in terms of our skills deficit, the march of the robots and the arrival of the fourth industrial revolution. We must not allow a gradual and dangerous narrowing of the curriculum, to the exclusion of either creativity or vocational education. The argument is often between traditionalists and non-traditionalists, and the Opposition paint a picture in which the Government are butchering our education system. I do not agree. We need to be not so much a butcher and more of a Baker. What I mean by that is that we should support the work of Lord Baker in encouraging much more vocational education, and I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to read the Edge Foundation's report on 14 to 19 education in relation to expanding the curriculum and looking into the possibility of replacing A-levels with a wider baccalaureate that would include much more vocational and technical education. We still have a way to go in giving young people the consistent message that technical education is every bit as demanding and worthwhile as a traditionally "academic" course, and we need to make it clear that the link between technical education and apprenticeships and the world of work is often much stronger.

The fifth and final challenge involves improving careers advice. Schools often cite the proportion of students who go on to elite or prestigious universities, but I believe the case can be made for shifting that focus on to the proportion of students in work or undertaking quality apprenticeships. We need to replace the existing duplicated careers services with a national skills service, as well as fulfilling our manifesto commitment of creating a UCAS for further education. We also need to work with Ofsted to ensure that schools are much clearer about how to address the skills needs in schools and provide careers advice. We need to ensure that schools are—to use the Baker terminology—meeting the requirements of the Baker clause, which states that they must invite university technical colleges and other colleges to talk to their children about apprenticeships.

So there you are, Madam Deputy Speaker: five challenges in what I hope was no more than nine minutes. My final challenge as Chair of the Education Committee is to carry the debate beyond the false choice between traditionalists and progressives, to focus on addressing social injustice and our skills deficit and, above all, to set out a strategic plan for the next 10 years for what our education must become.

2.16 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a genuine pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon). I so enjoy being on the Education Committee with him, and with all my other Committee colleagues—

Robert Halfon: I just want to say that I did not see the hon. Lady sitting there—because I was so busy looking at the marvellous hon. Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker)—but I am delighted that she is also here today as another member of our Committee.

Emma Hardy: Thank you very much. We do genuinely get on very well on the Education Committee, which is a welcome change from what happens in some of the debates that are conducted across the Floor of the House.

I sometimes feel that there is a false dichotomy between the sort of education we are putting forward here and the type of education that the Government are putting forward. There are also many things to do with statistics that are simply not true. It reminds me of when I was studying for my A-levels and I was talking to my lecturer about the use of statistics. They said to me, “Ah, Emma, you see, statistics are what a lamp post is to a drunken man: it is not so much for illumination as for leaning against.” That has often been proven to be true in debates about education.

What I experienced in my 11 years as an infant teacher until 2015 was the cuts to our schools and the impact they were having. The Government can cite figures and dance around the issue, and we can cite figures right back at them, but what are the parents, the teachers and the headteachers saying? That is where the truth of the matter actually lies. In March, 50 primary headteachers from Hull wrote to the Secretary of State about funding. They are desperate for more money for the special educational needs and high needs budget. In Hull, as many as 526 children aged four and under have been identified as displaying challenging behaviour or SEN.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Do you agree with me that—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I think the hon. Lady means, “Does my hon. Friend agree with me?”

Laura Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree with me that schools are having to bid for extra funding, and that that is a really dangerous direction for us to head in?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are so many people across this Chamber who have a shared sense of purpose and a belief that every child matters. I still believe that every child matters, but that seems to be getting twisted and distorted along the way. We simply do not have the money that SEN children in Hull desperately need. Headteachers wrote to the Secretary of State back in March and said:

“Mainstream schools are increasingly having to resort to fixed-term and permanent exclusions to deal with challenging pupils. This is despite the best efforts of dedicated staff in schools. There is a feeling that something has to change or schools will implode.”

Now, we know from the Education Committee’s recent inquiry into alternative provision that an increasing number of children are being expelled from the system or off-rolled. Why is that? It is not because teachers have suddenly become heartless or have suddenly stopped caring about the children in their classes, but simply because they do not have the necessary resources to deal with the different challenges that pupils come to school with due to the impacts of austerity and poverty.

What is happening outside schools is reflected in what is happening inside our schools. Children who come to school hungry or are coming to school after awful childhood experiences will display challenging behaviour, and schools do not have the necessary resources to deal with that behaviour. I say to the Secretary of State and the Schools Minister that alternative provision is a false economy that will cost the Government more money in the long run. Alternative provision is more expensive. Dealing with interventions for all these pupils as they go through their school career will be more expensive than helping and supporting schools at the beginning, when they need it. I never thought that I would be citing Estonia as a country with an education system that we should look at, but Estonia evaluates every single child at three years old for learning difficulties or any signs of special educational needs, so that interventions can be put in place to deal with the situation before those children start school. Our Government should be doing that if they actually want to save money.

Turning to saving money—another one of my bugbears—there seems to be a lot of talk from the Government about vice-chancellor pay at the moment. They seem to be getting hot under the collar and worked up about the issue, but there has not been a word about the pay of chief executive officers of multi-academy trusts. Is it right for some CEOs to be receiving over £450,000 a year? You are right to look shocked, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it right for CEOs to be getting paid that much money when our schools do not have enough money for their SEN pupils? Also on academies, is it right that millions of pounds have gone on related transactions within multi-academy trusts? Money could be saved by delving more deeply into the accounts of some trusts to examine what money is being wasted on. As a new Member of Parliament, I am subject to certain rules, which I absolutely support, and

[Emma Hardy]

one such rule is that I cannot employ any direct relation, and nor should I. However, the CEO of a multi-academy trust can employ every single member of their family in a number of different roles on whatever salary they see fit. We could examine that to find a way of redirecting funds towards the SEN pupils in Hull who so desperately need them.

Headteachers in Hull have asked for an additional £5 million, which is all that they need to help give every single child in the city a quality education. But this is not just about the children with SEN; there is an impact on every child. I know that because I was a teacher for 11 years, and if a child in a class has challenging behavioural difficulties, the teacher needs additional resources to help that child, which will help every other child in the class. A teacher who is dealing on their own with a pupil's challenging behaviour or learning difficulty will end up spending a disproportionate amount of time with that one pupil to the detriment of the others. The resources need to be in place to help SEN children and every other child in the class.

I get a bit—

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) *rose*—

Emma Hardy: Oh, go on—before I start again.

Afzal Khan: Would you also have—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman means, “Would my hon. Friend”.

Afzal Khan: Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the recent Children's Commissioner for England report that talks about the deep north-south divide in education? The situation in my constituency is a stark demonstration of that. All 25 primary schools and five secondary schools are facing cuts so, considering that over half of all secondary school pupils are on free schools meals, that means less support for some of our worst-off children, which cannot be good for society.

Emma Hardy: Absolutely. Interestingly, I was reading George Osborne's report about education in the north, and he has come up with the radical solution of having local bodies responsible for all the schools in a particular local area. Who could have thought of that? Who could have imagined that that could be a solution to some of our schools' problems? I do not agree with the Government's rhetoric about what our schools are facing and what the education system is like, because the Government would have us believe that it was a land of milk and honey where children were skipping around, sounding out words at the age of three and going on to become incredibly successful individuals. The reality is that there is a huge skills shortage that will become even greater post-Brexit. The other reality is that one child in 10 has a mental health problem, and I believe part of that mental health problem is a result of the curriculum and the school system that our young people are put through.

What else is there? We have a crisis in recruitment and retention, and many teachers are giving up. I left in 2015 to find a career doing something else, and many of my colleagues are doing the same. There is an idea that the Government are going to provide more money for teachers to teach maths. It is a great idea—well done—but

find the maths teachers first before promising more money for pupils to study the subject. We have more looked-after children than ever before, because there is not enough money for children's services. Debt is increasing for those leaving university. More children are being off-rolled or “home educated”. Alternative provision is full. Pupil referral units are full to capacity, and there is not enough space to meet the demand from children who need to attend them. That is this Government's true record on education. That is the reality that children are facing. The Government are letting down so many children and parents, and it is unacceptable for the Government to offer rhetoric about the number of “good” and “outstanding” schools when they are failing our children on the ground.

I ask everyone in the Chamber to think about why we are here. What do we stand for? What do we value? I am clear about my purpose, which is the same as when I was a teacher for all those years: I stand for every single child in the country. I will keep opposing this Government and the changes that they are introducing, which are damaging education and our children's futures. I will end by quoting my nanny, who says, “If you pay cheap, you pay twice,” and that is exactly what is happening with this Government. The lack of money for education will lead to a higher bill in the future for all our young people.

2.28 pm

David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate on schools, although I am rather disappointed by the Opposition's motion. I have a lot of time for the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), who made an interesting speech and is a passionate believer in education, but any debate on schools must be wide-ranging and not just about money. Resources are of course vital, but this is also about the curriculum, the quality of staff, good leadership, the ethos of the school, the behaviour of schools and so much more.

Access to good schools is essential for children, as a good education is the foundation of success throughout life, both professionally, personally and for our economy. I congratulate the Secretary of State for Education on his speech and his approach, which is reasonable and realistic. I was fortunate to be the first in my family to go to university, which can be attributed to the fantastic state schools I attended and the brilliant teachers I was fortunate to have. Family background obviously helped, too—my mother made sure I did my homework—but, having said that, it was inspirational teachers who helped me.

I am a former teacher and lecturer, and we should applaud the significant progress that this Government have made on education standards and opportunities in particular, as well as on resources. There are 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools than there were in 2010, which is a real achievement. We all need to be much more positive about our education system and the improvements we are seeing. So many more young people are going to our world-class universities than ever before, and we have the highest proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds participating in education since records began. Those are real achievements. Of course there are issues—there are always issues in education—but we have to build slowly and satisfactorily to achieve what we want to achieve.

School funding is increasing, but we also appreciate and understand that there are increasing pressures on school resources. The Secretary of State is right to say there are no great schools without great teachers. Frontline teachers have to be the best if we want to get the best out of our young people.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): It is a fact that 50 out of 55 schools in Halton, which is part of the constituency I represent, have had a real-terms funding cut totalling more than £4 million. I listen to the teachers and parents I represent—maybe I am living on a slightly different planet from Conservative Members—and that is the reality on the ground.

David Evennett: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, and I am in the real world, too, as we all are on this side of the House. Every Conservative Member goes around schools in their constituency and listens to what teachers, school governors and parents are saying, but the fact remains that this Government are spending more and putting more into our education system than any previous Government.

I will take no lectures from Labour Members. When they were in government, we had falling standards and high inflation, which undermined the resources that were being put into schools. Let us be reasonable and realistic.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

David Evennett: The hon. Lady will have to listen for a little bit, otherwise I will go over the informal time limit.

The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne talked about healthy breakfasts, and we all know that a healthy breakfast helps children to make the most of their school day. We should also recognise that £26 million is being invested in breakfast clubs to help the most disadvantaged in our society. I think we all believe in a truly meritocratic society, and to get that we have to make sure there is fairness in schools.

Regrettably, many schools across the country have historically been underfunded. The Minister for School Standards has been receptive to meeting people to discuss the funding issues, and the Government have attempted to make sure there is fairer funding across the country. We cannot achieve everything immediately, but we can achieve it in the long term. The Department is determined to make sure that schools across the country are getting a fair deal on funding, and we welcome that.

It is a pity the Opposition do not acknowledge that the Government are putting more money into our schools and that school funding will rise from £41 billion this year to £43.5 billion in 2019-20. The new funding formula provides a cash increase to local authorities, with schools that have historically been underfunded attracting significantly more resources.

Siobhain McDonagh: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the London challenge, a project to produce improvements in schools, was completely transformative

and set London on the path to having the best, rather than the worst, schools in the country? Does he agree that Lord Adonis and those involved in the scheme should be congratulated?

David Evennett: Some very positive things came out of the London challenge. I would not want to denigrate it but, on the other hand, there are areas where the London challenge was not quite so successful.

We also need to look at how much we are investing in new good school places, and at the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in phonics, which has risen from 58% in 2012 to 81% in 2017. That good news means 154,000 more six-year-olds are on track to become fluent readers compared with 2012. Those are real achievements. It is not just about resources; it is about the money that goes in and what comes out—the consequences of the money and the consequences of the teaching.

I was honoured to work with my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), as his Parliamentary Private Secretary when he was Secretary of State for Education, to help implement the academies programme in 2012. The programme has transformed schools, releasing those schools from local authorities, particularly in areas that were doing badly.

The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) mentioned that education was pretty poor under certain London local authorities, and now it has been transformed. In my Borough of Bexley, as a result of the coalition Government and then the Conservative Government, there are now 25 more good and outstanding schools than there were in 2010. Schools in Bexley have seen a funding boost of £3.8 million for 2018-19, which brings the funding for schools in Bexley to just over £211 million a year. That is a real achievement. The Government have to be praised for doing this, and so do the teachers, parents and pupils who have rowed in behind those extra resources to make sure they achieve for themselves in society.

We have many brilliant secondary and primary schools in Bexley, with diverse education provision—church schools, academies, grammar schools and technical schools—and that is the way forward. Diversity allows children's talents to be maximised.

I highlight Slade Green, which is the most disadvantaged part of my constituency. It now has St Paul's (Slade Green) Primary School, Haberdashers' Aske's Crayford Temple Grove north campus, and Peareswood Primary School, which I am afraid were neglected by the funding system under the last Labour Government but are now achieving and succeeding. They are giving children in a more deprived part of my constituency a real opportunity to achieve.

It therefore comes as no surprise that Bexley was listed as one of the social mobility hotspots by the Social Mobility Commission's state of the nation report in November 2017, but there is still much more to be done. We need to achieve social mobility, and I am proud to join the social mobility pledge that my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), the former Education Secretary, recently launched. The pledge makes three commitments: partnering directly with schools and colleges to provide coaching through quality careers advice, which is so important; providing

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structured work experience and/or apprenticeship opportunities to people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances; and adopting open recruitment practices that promote a level playing field, such as blind recruitment. Conservative Members, just as much as the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, want to see disadvantaged children have the maximum opportunity to achieve what they need to achieve.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in line with your determination that we should not speak for too long, I have had my time, but I would say to the House and to both Front Bench teams that education is a vital service for our future, for our country and for individuals. It is our duty to work to our best ability to make sure that the most disadvantaged get the opportunities and encouragement to narrow the attainment gap. Making sure that more and more children attend good or outstanding schools is the only way forward, as everyone will then be given opportunities.

I regret that we have not heard much from the Opposition about their policies for doing that, apart from more money. We are not just talking about money, although, yes, we are giving more money. Education would not be safe in their hands if they were in government because they just want to throw money at it. Money and resources are important, but it is about much more than that.

I congratulate Ministers and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on their work to provide more power to achieve these things for the benefit of all our children.

2.39 pm

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): At the start of 2017, before becoming a Member of Parliament, I attended a meeting at a local high school, which was being held to raise awareness of the national funding formula and how it would impact on that school, and indeed others in the area. The headteacher was very honest about the challenges the school would face with the additional real-terms cuts to budgets; historically, ours was one of the worst areas in the country on this already. Parents listened to the facts and rightly raised their concerns about the impact this would have on their children: teaching assistants and teachers faced uncertainty as to whether they would still have jobs; the curriculum would be squeezed of subjects not seen as essential; opportunities for extra-curricular experiences would be jeopardised; and buildings and IT would not be updated unless critical. The mood was one of absolute disbelief. People were encouraged to engage in the consultation, but it was so unbelievably complicated that it had school governors and headteachers scratching their heads.

As a teacher myself, I left that meeting knowing that I had to do something; local parents needed to be informed and my colleagues deserved to be heard. I took to social media to explain what this funding formula would mean for our schools, and it is amazing what happens when people are informed about facts. I organised a campaign consisting of a packed public meeting, a 1,000-strong march and lots of people engaging with the consultation. It raised the profile of the issue locally, we had national coverage and it gave concerned parents and teachers a voice.

What we are actually facing long term in education is a complete crisis. Research shows that 94% of teachers are buying equipment and resources for basic teaching. My experience of teaching is that staff have always been willing to spend some of their own money for the odd item, such as prizes for children, but the funding cuts are digging deep. That is making it hard for schools to manage without being subsidised by staff and parents; the National Education Union reports that one in five said their schools were asking parents for financial contributions as a result of budget pressures, while two thirds said funding for special needs provision had been cut. It is wrong to rely on the good will of teachers and parents to meet the shortfall when pay has fallen over the past 10 years. The Government need to fund schools adequately, so that children can enjoy a full curriculum, in properly resourced institutions.

Many of my friends are still teachers, and staff morale is the lowest I have ever known it. Teachers are being stretched in so many different directions. Any time teachers might have once had for prep at school and to complete the ever-increasing amount of admin is being taken away to cover for staff who are not being replaced. Funding cuts are resulting in bigger class sizes, and cuts to support staff mean we are seeing more and more children with complex needs not getting the necessary support. The cuts to frontline teaching posts are happening at a time when pupil to classroom teacher ratios are rising, which means bigger classes and less individual attention for children. The funding situation also continues to have a growing impact on teachers' pay and working conditions. The NEU believes that the damaging cuts to teachers' pay must be reversed. Pay should be restored at least to the levels in place before the Government misguidedly imposed their pay freezes and pay limits. With schools already struggling with the funding crisis, it is vital that the Government allocate additional funding to support the pay levels needed to address the recruitment and retention crisis.

Another impact of the real-terms funding cuts is on the opportunities for children to participate in extra-curricular activities and school trips. Today, my son is going on his first residential trip, at six years old—one night, sleeping over, at the cost of £60. Like his school friends, he is bursting with excitement. I know that he is about to do something that he will always remember. How awful then to hear from other schools in my constituency that they will be unable to do school trips. Why? It is because they cannot afford to subsidise the trips for the poorer students. So, once again, the poorest are starved of opportunities that children from wealthier families can access. How desperately unfair our education system has become.

My constituency is part of the f40. Forty-one of the group's 42 member authorities responded to its survey and unanimously agreed that the formula being introduced in April 2018 did not yet fully meet f40's aspirations. f40, like myself, welcomed the Government's commitment to an additional £1.3 billion for school funding, but the survey demonstrates that concerns remain and there is still more work to do to tackle the remaining locked-in inequalities. Although the Government have added more cash to the system, a gap between the better funded and worst funded remains. Specifically, maintaining protections to the best-funded areas has meant that the historical inequalities will take longer to iron out. Like the f40,

I believe that a needs-led funding formula that reflects the true cost of running a school and an adjustment to the balance between funding blocks, with an enhancement of core funding and reduction to additional needs, are required changes.

Michael Tomlinson: I have been listening carefully to what the hon. Lady is saying. Like hers, my constituency was part of the f40 campaign. Will she therefore recognise the steps this Government took, which the last Labour Government failed to take, to address those inequalities? While I am standing, let me say that it is welcome at least to hear her acknowledgement of additional money going in.

Laura Smith: I believe I acknowledged that extra money going into the system and mentioned it in my speech.

The right to a decent, diverse and inspirational education is something every child deserves, no matter their background, no matter their ability. School is about so much more than just results and attainment. It should be a place of safety, support and development, and children deserve access to teachers who feel valued and inspired themselves. I became a teacher because I love to see the spark in a child's eyes when they find that thing that makes them tick. Every child I ever worked with had something to offer, and as a teacher it was my job to tune into it and give them the confidence and self-belief to learn. Teachers are working harder than ever, with fewer resources and more challenges, and their wellbeing is being affected massively. Who, ultimately, misses out as a result of the crisis that schools face? It is every person in our society, as the kids of today are the future of tomorrow. They did not cause the global economic crisis and they should not be punished for others' failings.

2.47 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, because Conservative Members have a duty to put the record right on some of the statements that Opposition Members are making. They continue to peddle myths day after day in the Chamber. Today, I feel as if I am in a parallel universe to the one those Opposition Members are in. I ask myself: why would the Opposition promote these many myths in the way they do? What is their reason for doing this? I do hope they are not doing it knowingly, misleading the public to spread fear and distract from the reality of the situation. Unlike in the glory days of "Education, education, education", the Labour party now has no plan. It is unable to present an alternative vision for education in this country and unable effectively to cost the pledges it does make without burdening our children and our children's children with huge amounts of debt.

Let us examine the facts. The proposed new funding formula, which will right the historical wrong of the schools funding postcode lottery, will mean that schools in Erewash will receive an increase of 5%—that means £2.6 million more to spend on education in my constituency. That is not a cut. As we speak, the new multimillion-pound Wilsthorpe Community School is nearing the end of its construction phase, in preparation for opening its doors to students from Long Eaton and the surrounding area in September. This is a great example of real investment

by this Government, through the Education and Skills Funding Agency, to update a school that had previously been neglected by Labour.

Laura Smith: The point has been made—you just made it—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order.

Laura Smith: The hon. Lady just made the point—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Excellent.

Laura Smith: I am still getting used to this place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise. The hon. Lady made the point that there is more funding going into the system, and I recognise that—it is true—but does she also accept that there are more children in schools, so that money is being spread more thinly?

Maggie Throup: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention, but once again, I think that the myths have been spread and spread. If we look at it historically, in Erewash during all the 13 years of Labour government, schools were underfunded completely. Thankfully, this Government are correcting the wrong that was in place for so many years.

Like many other public services, schools are much more than the building or the money we spend on them. As others have mentioned, those who go into education often talk about a vocation—a calling in life—and in Erewash we have some extraordinary examples of teachers and teaching assistants who go above and beyond to give our children the very best start in life.

One example is Chaucer Junior School, whose pupils can often be found gardening or litter picking. I joined them to pick litter, and it taught them a lesson about how important it is not to drop litter, so it is an educational activity as well. They also visit places such as Parliament, which adds real value to their education. That is down not to the funding the school receives but the hard work and dedication of the staff who are willing to organise and facilitate those activities. I can cite example after example from my constituency, including English Martyrs in Long Eaton, which was visited a couple of years ago by the Minister for School Standards, who is on the Front Bench and who tested their maths when he visited. That school regularly gets to the final of the green school awards, which means they can come down to London, go to London Zoo and be part of the bigger picture that schools and education provide.

Sadly, the story in Erewash is not all a bed of roses and students are suffering, not because of funding cuts but because of teaching time lost by politically motivated strike action. Like its colleagues in Labour and Momentum, the NASUWT has been prepared to weaponise teachers in opposition to academisation, despite it being in the best interests of students and, I remind the House, a policy that began under Labour.

Last month, the Opposition were forced to retreat over the issue of free school meals, not just by the Government but by the team at Channel 4. Indeed, even the Labour candidate in Erewash embarrassed herself in our local press by jumping the gun, blindly following the party line rather than checking local facts, and was

[Maggie Throup]

rightly exposed for it. In a similar vein, the Opposition are pursuing today's debate with the same misguided intent, rather than using it as a constructive way of proposing policy.

Having spoken before this debate to those in my office about their own time in school, with their experience spanning time from Wilson to Cameron, I found that they can all recall the charitable element historically embraced by our education system to support the formal budget set by Government. The parent teacher association raffle, the summer fair, the Christmas pantomime and the sponsored walk while dressed as a hippo—I have yet to find out who wore the hippo outfit—helped to pay for things as wide-ranging as a minibus and basic extra equipment. There is nothing new about people contributing to school budgets rather than relying on what the Government provide.

We must ask ourselves what makes a school. I would argue this is about more than just the funding that the Government provide. I agree with the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) on one point: she said that it is not just about money. Yes, we would all like more money, but it is clear that in Erewash there are no cuts, despite what the Opposition would like the public to believe. Instead, we have both an increase in funding and significant investment in new school buildings.

Mike Amesbury: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Maggie Throup: I am just finishing.

In Erewash, at the core, we have an inspirational team of teaching professionals who manage their schools creatively within budget and, more importantly, look beyond the balance sheet, choosing instead to focus on the vital job of educating our next generation.

2.54 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I would like to begin by putting on record my admiration and appreciation for the remarkable efforts of schools in my constituency and the Borough of Merton. I am proud to say that under the most testing of circumstances, every single secondary school in Merton is now rated good or outstanding and has a GCSE progress 8 score that the Department for Education ranks as No. 1 in England, with Liberty Primary School in Mitcham in the top 1% of all schools for pupil progress in reading, writing and maths.

I am sure that Members across the Chamber will join me in congratulating Harris Primary Academy, which last year became the second outstanding primary school in Mitcham and Morden after Singlegate. They join Merton's growing list of outstanding secondary schools, which includes Harris Academy Merton, Harris Academy Morden, the Ursuline, and Ricards Lodge. What makes that success even more remarkable is the circumstances in which it has been achieved—circumstances that are worsening term by term.

Schools in Merton are set to lose a staggering £1,820,818 between 2015 and 2020, despite their pupil numbers rising. It is no wonder that 40% of primary schools and 60% of secondary schools in Merton have had to cut

staff since 2014. By 2020, Aragon Primary School will lose £100,118, William Morris Primary School will lose £72,582 and the outstanding Singlegate Primary School will lose £102,086—the extraordinary equivalent of £204 per pupil.

Across the country, staff numbers in England's secondary schools have fallen by 15,000 since 2014, despite there being 4,500 more pupils to teach. That is 5.5 staff members lost in each school. Meanwhile, 62% of those schools have increased the size of their classes, despite the shortage of staff.

Behind the facts and figures are the governors, pupils and teachers struggling to cope. Yesterday, a group of teachers wrote to me from their staff room and said:

"We are stretched beyond belief. Corners are being cut, stopping the breadth of the curriculum and yet, despite the setbacks, we are expected to produce better outcomes than ever before! We've even run out of pens, glue sticks and basic stationery!"

Schools have been admirably shielding their pupils from the damage these cuts are causing, but they can go on for only so long. These schools are facing hardship like never before.

I would like to read some brief extracts from letters I have recently received from three different headteachers in my constituency. First:

"We see children who eat their lunch very quickly, whilst 'protecting' their plate with an arm as they eat"

so that nobody can steal their food. Secondly:

"If he won the lottery, one child said he would go food shopping to buy lots of cereal and porridge to fill him up and keep him warm."

Another said:

"We believe that a significant number of our children are so used to feeling hungry and cold that they do not recognise these feelings",

and:

"We have children in temporary accommodation changing schools several times, impacting them socially, educationally and financially."

When I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who is responsible for children and families, about the impact of temporary accommodation on education he acknowledged that it can mean changing schools and that it is strongly associated with poorer attainment, but he then claimed that these schools are provided with extra resources to combat that. The reality is that the pupil in question, moving from school to school, has now become a persistent absentee. Experience suggests that he might never overcome that avoidable dismantling of his education.

The Government argue that they are trying to distribute funds more fairly, but they fail to address the uneven battle that those in the most disadvantaged areas face even to attend a good school in the first place. A child living in one of England's most disadvantaged is 27 times more likely to go to an inadequate school than a child living in one of the least disadvantaged areas. Spreading the funding evenly, therefore, does not fairly share the opportunity. How do I explain to the furious teachers, governors and parents across Mitcham and Morden why their class sizes are bigger, why their teaching assistants have gone, and what has happened to the subjects that their school now simply cannot afford?

There will be almost no real-term winners under the Government's proposals. The cake needs to be bigger for anyone to get a bigger, fairer slice.

2.59 pm

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate and to have the opportunity yet again to speak on the important subject of our schools.

On Monday evening, I asked the shadow Secretary of State whether her debate about students was playing politics with students. She did not directly answer me then, but she answered me today and made it absolutely and explicitly clear that her reason for calling this debate was directly linked to the upcoming elections, so she is playing politics not only with our students, but with our school children. It was very disappointing to hear that. There were one or two parts of her speech with which I agreed and I will come to them in a few moments, but there was much with which I disagreed.

The old system over which Labour presided had areas with similar characteristics receiving vastly different sums of money. That was not because of deprivation. Had it been because of areas of deprivation, I could have looked my constituents in the eye and said, "The reason you are receiving £2,000 per pupil less than students in another part of the country is that the area in which you live is not as deprived." That was not the reason. It was because of historical anomalies and because successive Governments had failed to tackle the problem. This Government have tackled it. Dorset was in the bottom 11 for funding of local authorities and Poole was in the bottom two—the two local authorities that cover my constituency.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), who is no longer in her place, mentioned the f40 campaign. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who most recently led that campaign and made determined arguments to Government as to the historic unfairness of the old system. I know that he is itching to speak in this debate but, given his elevation and his new role in the Education Department, he is forbidden from doing so. None the less, I pay tribute to him for his role as chairman of the f40 campaign.

As a direct result of that campaign, the national funding formula has been introduced by this Government. As I have said, the issue was sadly ducked in the past. The Labour party had the opportunity to grasp it but it ducked it. As a direct result of the change, schools in Dorset will receive a 4.2% increase and, in Poole, a 3.8% increase in 2019-20 compared with 2015-16.

We should look at funding not just in this country, but internationally. I was delighted that the Secretary of State mentioned the international comparisons. For example, spending per pupil in England is higher than in Germany and Japan. I would like the Schools Minister to consider whether it is higher than in France. The international tables suggest that our spending per pupil is higher than in France as well as than in Germany and Japan. Can he confirm that in closing the debate?

Real-terms spending has also gone up. The motion mentions a "cash terms increase", but this Government have gone further than that because there are real-terms school spending increases. Per pupil spending in 2019-20

will be more than 50% higher than it was under Labour in 2000-01. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich did accept, perhaps slightly grudgingly, that more money is going in. Perhaps we need to have more clarity and more acceptance of that fact from the Labour party—*[Interruption.]* I have mentioned per pupil funding. I will repeat what I said, because I do not think that the shadow Secretary of State was listening. Per pupil funding in 2019-20 will be 50% higher than under Labour in 2000-01.

This is not just about spending; it is also about what is actually done with that money. Whether we make international comparisons, or compare our record with Labour's record, we are spending more. However, that should not be the test. The test should be what is actually done with the money. That is where the shadow Secretary of State did say one thing that was right. She did say that it is not just about the money and she is absolutely right. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (David Evennett) also dwelt on that point.

The question is, what to do with that money? What do we as parents want? What does any of us want? We want our children to be happy, to go to a good school, to achieve their potential and to get the best results that they possibly can. Now that we have shown, and now that some on the Labour Benches have accepted, that we are spending more money than ever before, we need to turn the conversation to look not just at money, but at standards—what we are actually doing with that money—and to congratulate our teachers who are doing such a good job.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): An independent study by the Education Policy Institute said that Labour-run Harrow was the most improved education authority in the country and that the progress that pupils make in Harrow is greater than anywhere else in the UK when they start at secondary school. Therefore, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would follow the example of other Conservatives who have blessed us with their presence for campaigning purposes in Harrow and perhaps bring with him the Schools Minister to see what works so well in Harrow. If he does, I warn him that he will hear stories from headteachers, parents and governors starved of resources at Harrow schools and worried about whether they will be able to maintain the high standards that they have achieved because of real-terms cuts in funding.

Michael Tomlinson: I would be delighted to accept the hon. Gentleman's invitation. In fact, I am campaigning elsewhere tomorrow. Had I not been, I would certainly have taken him up on his offer and come to Harrow. When I do so, I will ensure that I let him know. He is right in this respect: he is right to look at standards. He is right to look at the output and to congratulate our teachers when they do that excellent work, as I do now. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to all those teachers in Mid Dorset and North Poole. I have said in this place before that I am somebody who has run away from teaching. I come from a family of teachers and I admire them. Some of the best things that I do in this Chamber and in this House involve my work with schools—both welcoming schools and pupils here and also when I visit schools back home in Dorset.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talked about the measurement of “outputs”; I think that is what he said. I would suggest “outcomes”. I agree that looking at what money goes in and what the outcomes are is crucial. When I was a member of the Public Accounts Committee last year, I asked the Department for Education how it was measuring the changes in funding over the next few years with regard to the outcomes that we are currently using and what we will have by, for example, 2020. There is no measurement of the current money going in, the outcomes that we have and the future outcomes under reduced budgets over time. You cannot track it in that way. I am interested to hear his views.

Michael Tomlinson: My view is that we should look at the definitive evidence, which is the international standard, the progress in international reading literacy study, because that is an international comparative study directed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. A report released in December 2017 confirmed that England’s score is significantly above the international median score. England had the highest average performance in all four PIRLS cycles. It was a pleasure to read reports that reading standards in England are the best in a generation. That did not happen by accident. That was as a direct result of policies enacted by this Government and by this Schools Minister. It is a record of which we should be proud.

3.8 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Once again, we are here at an Opposition-day debate where the Opposition play political football with the issue of schools. The shadow Secretary of State actually admitted to that during her opening remarks. The Opposition are playing on the fears of parents one week before the local elections. Again, that is something to which she openly admitted. That is really what this debate is all about. This is not a serious debate about school funding because, if it were, it would be about why constituencies such as mine have, for decades, been funded significantly less than urban authorities: 49% per head of population have been funded less than in urban areas. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) said, this was based not on need, but on geography and history. That is a wrong that this Conservative Government are putting right.

When the fairer funding formula was announced, I was the first to visit headteachers in my constituency, who spoke about the increased pressures and rising costs of running schools. I took those headteachers to meet the Minister so that they could discuss their concerns, and the Government listened. The figures that came out at the end of last year showed a significant increase in funding—between 4% and 8%, on average—for schools in my constituency. That is a welcome boost. It does not account for some of the pressures that schools are still facing and that I am meeting headteachers to discuss. But that is a serious debate. It is not about making the issue a political football and once again scaremongering teachers, parents and pupils.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): My hon. Friend, like me, represents a rural constituency. The lack of funding that we get in comparison with

urban areas is putting real pressure on schools, especially in dealing with children with special needs. Does she agree that the time has come to ensure that the differences between rural and urban areas are rectified?

Maria Caulfield: Absolutely. Ministers are listening to this, and it is an ongoing debate and process. The figures published late last year are an indication of the progress that we are making. The facts have been checked by independent sources such as Full Fact, which has said that it is “correct” to say that school spending is at record levels. The shadow Secretary of State quoted the IFS. I will repeat what the IFS said, which is that the extra £1.3 billion for schools means that school spending will not fall but will stay the same per pupil. And that is the key point. There are not actually school cuts; there are pressures and costs, but the funding is increasing.

I have some questions for the Minister from primary schools in Lewes. First, will the Minister confirm that the pupil premium will be ongoing for the long term? Schools have found that extremely helpful. The second question is a request for a long-term funding settlement, not a year-on-year one, as it would make long-term planning easier for schools. Thirdly, schools would like us to use the census data starting from January, not October, because they are sometimes carrying pupils for the length of the school year, but are not actually being paid for them. Those are three requests from primary schools in Lewes, in a serious debate about school funding.

Gareth Thomas: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Maria Caulfield: I will not for the moment.

How have the unions reacted to this debate? Do they welcome this school funding? Do they welcome the Government redressing the balance between urban and rural areas? No. The National Union of Teachers has been quite open about making this a political campaign. In fact, it spent £326,000 campaigning on this issue during the general election last year—more than the Green party and UKIP. The union uses this issue as a political football for election purposes. That is a shocking state of affairs.

The NUT sent letters to parents, frightening them about school funding cuts that were not actually coming, and put banners in schools telling parents how much their children would be losing, when that was not true at all. It spread lies and fear. It is under investigation by the Electoral Commission for submitting incomplete spending returns. Given the funding announcements after the election, hon. Members might think that there would be a consensus to support the Government and welcome the funding increase. But no—the joint general secretary urged members at a recent conference in Brighton to ramp up their efforts ahead of the local elections as school funding is a top concern for voters. This is the true reason that we are having this debate. The NUT said about the issue of school funding that

“if voters changed their mind because of that—then we are pleased... We make no apology. We will do it again.”

That is the whole purpose of today’s debate. It is about next Thursday; it is not about schools funding or the future of our children.

Just look at the example of Labour authorities up and down the country, including Brighton and Hove, right next door to me, where some of my constituents

send their children to school. The council there has been having issues taking in more children. Brighton's *The Argus* newspaper investigated this case in an exposé by their lead reporter, Joel Adams. The council told parents that it had no money and could not accommodate children, and that this was all down to Government cuts. *The Argus* found, however, that the Government had actually given Brighton and Hove City Council £15 million to deal with the problem and build new classrooms, and that the Labour council had refused to spend it. It preferred to send out letters scaremongering parents and to put up banners on railings than to spend the £15 million that it was given by this Conservative Government. That is the truth.

Some of the schools in my constituency that sent letters to parents have now had an 8% increase in funding. When I challenged them on this, they said that there is pressure from the unions to get the message out. It is absolutely disgraceful. Opposition Members should be ashamed of themselves for raising this fear and scaremongering. But the truth is out today, because we heard it from the shadow Secretary of State; we all know that this is about the elections next Thursday.

I will close my speech with another irony. The whole point of this debate was to challenge parties about what they put in their manifesto and how they will find the money. Well, what did the Labour party put in its manifesto? Abolishing tuition fees. But once the election was over, that was suddenly just an aspiration and the abacus was put into storage for the next general election.

Angela Rayner: Will the hon. Lady take the opportunity to correct the record? We said in our manifesto that we would abolish tuition fees, and we continue to say that we would abolish tuition fees.

Maria Caulfield: I welcome that announcement, as it takes me to the second point I mentioned: where is this money coming from? As the abacus is in storage, we will have to wait until the next election to find out.

The Labour party's aspiration is to spend, spend, spend—with no idea where the money is coming from. But we know from the Labour leader that Venezuela is the role model that his party is following—an aspiration to all of us fighting against austerity and neoliberal economics. At schools in Venezuela, children are missing 40% of their classes while teachers queue up in food lines, and the rate of children dropping out of school there has doubled. That is Labour's vision for this country. It is not one that I want for the children here.

3.16 pm

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief speech in this debate. I had attempted to intervene on the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), who it is a pleasure to follow.

I will take this opportunity to praise the work of all the teachers across the country, particularly—if the House will forgive me—those at Harrow schools. I commend the governors of Harrow schools for their leadership, but some credit is also due to local authorities, particularly to a local authority that has been recognised by the independent analysis of the Education Policy Institute as offering the best education in the country. It is a Labour council facing huge cutbacks as a result of

the Government's austerity policies. More than £100 million has been lost, yet it still provides as good a service as it is able to for our schools.

I gently say to Conservative Members that there is certainly a case for schools in rural areas to receive more funding. I do not dispute that. But there is also a strong argument that schools in urban areas, such as my own, should also be receiving additional funding. I gently chide the Conservative Members who I have had the chance to listen to this afternoon for not acknowledging the challenges that headteachers and teachers in urban areas such as mine face in managing budgets that are shrinking in real terms. For example, most primary schools in my constituency have lost teaching assistants in the last 12 months.

I gently suggest to any Conservative MPs wanting to campaign in local elections in Harrow that they are extremely welcome; I would happily facilitate meetings with headteachers in my constituency, so that they can hear from the horse's mouth—from those at the coalface of education in Harrow—about the challenges that they face in managing shrinking budgets. There is second issue around capital, which I will come to in a minute.

Daniel Kawczynski: The hon. Gentleman asks us to sympathise with his schools, but how can we do that when our schools receive a fraction of the funding per head that his schools get?

Gareth Thomas: I will take back to my constituents the fact that a Conservative MP is saying that schools in Harrow should be cut to fund schools in his area. Had he asked whether I would join him in calling for more funding to be invested in education, I would have been happy to consider that. I repeat to him the offer that I made to his Conservative colleagues: if he wants to come and campaign in my constituency and help to achieve an even bigger Labour majority on Harrow Council, he would be very welcome to do so. I would happily facilitate for him a meeting with the headteachers of a couple of the primary schools who had to axe teaching assistant positions just in the past 12 months alone.

Daniel Kawczynski *rose*—

Gareth Thomas: I am not going to allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene again, if he will forgive me, because I want to—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I do not think that either hon. Member was here at the very beginning of this debate, and the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) had not indicated that he wished to speak. Of course he has every right to speak, but I hope that he will pay respect to the amount of time that he is taking out of other people's speeches.

Gareth Thomas: It is for exactly that reason that I was resisting the very agreeable temptation, in other circumstances, to allow the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) to intervene a second time.

My last point is about capital funding. It would be good to hear from the Schools Minister that he might be sympathetic to further requests from Harrow schools

[Gareth Thomas]

for the additional capital they need to tackle asbestos hazards and which are not fit for purpose as a result, or from schools that need further investment as a result of an increase in population in Harrow. We have been starved, as other areas have, of the capital that is needed to invest in our schools. I hope that that issue will be addressed, if not now, then at a future Budget.

3.21 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is obvious that the Schools Minister is becoming increasingly isolated in this Chamber because he will be the only Member to stand at the Dispatch Box in this debate who is not a Mancunian. The Secretary of State said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), regarding the devastating impact of school cuts that are going on up and down the country and in his constituency, that the funding is what it is. I think that teachers up and down the land, particularly headteachers, will be very worried about that. I remind the Secretary of State that between 2015-16 and 2019-20, Hampshire, his local authority, will be facing a £14 million cut.

The Secretary of State actually went to school very near me, at St Ambrose College in Hale Barns in Trafford borough, which I had the pleasure to visit again only last week. Interestingly, Trafford borough, which I represent—its education authority is a member of the f40 group, as is the case with many Members here—faces a real-terms cut of £3.3 million. That is certainly a big issue on the doorstep as we pound the streets night after night. Meanwhile, the Schools Minister in West Sussex faces his headteachers threatening a four-day week because of school funding cuts.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) said, this motion, is about what the Conservative party promised at the last election. It promised:

“Under a future Conservative Government the amount of money following your child into the school will be protected. There will be a real-terms increase in the schools budget in the next Parliament.”

That pledge was also made also by the previous Prime Minister, who was very clear about what he meant. He said:

“I can tell you, with a Conservative government, the amount of money following your child into the school will not be cut.”

But the Government are not keeping their promise to the British people. Under this Government, schools are facing the first real-terms cuts to their budgets in nearly 20 years, despite the Secretary of State having inadvertently claimed the opposite in the House earlier this year. The National Audit Office has said that with the current spending settlement there will be an 8% cut in the pupil funding between 2015 and 2020. The same conclusion was reached by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. This means that every school in every region and every town will lose money because of the failure of this Government to protect funding for our schools.

The so-called fair funding formula will simply redistribute the same inadequate sum of money that is already failing to support our schools and provide our children with the excellent education they are entitled to. The National Audit Office, again, has said that the Department

for Education is expecting schools to find £3 billion in savings over this Parliament, yet it has failed to communicate to schools how they can achieve this. While we do of course support the principle that schools should receive fair funding, the answer is not to take money away from existing schools and redistribute it when budgets across the country are being cut. The solution is to invest in education to help every child to receive an excellent education.

The Government's stated aim in revising the school funding formula is fairness. There should be fairness in the funding formula, and there are good things about it, such as an emphasis on high needs and a deprivation index, albeit a crude measure, and a focus on prior attainment. Why would we not welcome those things? However, there is nothing fair about a proposal under which funding will be cut from high performing schools in deprived areas. A fair approach would be to take the best performing areas in the country and apply the lessons from those schools everywhere. It would look objectively at the funding required to deliver in the best performing schools, particularly in areas of high deprivation, and use that as the basis of a formula to be applied across the country.

Unfortunately, though, this Government are not listening to the chorus of voices of schools, teachers and parents across this country. We only have to look at the impact already being played out in our schools. Let us start with class sizes. Over half a million infant school children are now in super-sized classes. New research by the leading education unions shows that class sizes are rising in the majority of secondary schools in England as a result of Government underfunding of education. There is a particular problem in secondary schools because of the shortfall of £500 million a year in funding for 11 to 16-year-olds between 2015 and 2020. This disaster does not end there. When our children get to sixth form, they face even more deep cuts—over 17% per pupil since 2010. Sixty-two per cent. of secondary schools in England have increased the size of their classes in the past two years alone.

The second huge impact is on teacher numbers, as we have heard. Staff numbers in secondary schools have fallen by 15,000 between 2014-15 and 2016-17, despite 4,500 more pupils to teach. This equates to an average loss of over five staff members in each school since 2015. In practical terms, this means nearly 2.5 fewer classroom teachers, 1.6 fewer classroom assistants, and 1.5 fewer extra support staff in every school. Cuts to frontline teaching posts are happening now—at a time when pupil to classroom teacher ratios are rising, meaning bigger classes and less individual attention for children. New research published only last month by the Education Policy Institute shows that many schools that have been struggling financially are now in deficit. The number of local authority-maintained schools in deficit has nearly trebled, meaning that over a quarter of all local authority-maintained schools are now in deficit. In 2016-17, the proportion of primary schools in deficit also increased significantly, to 7%. The average primary school deficit noticeably increased from £72,000 in 2010-11 to £107,000 in 2016-17.

Similar figures are found for local authority-maintained primary schools. In 2016-17, over 60% were spending more than their income. A quarter of local authority-maintained primaries have had a falling balance for

two years or more. The Education Policy Institute report points to the inevitable outcome of those growing budget pressures. It states that staff account for the majority of spending by schools—around two thirds—and it is likely that schools will

“find it difficult to achieve the scale of savings necessary”

to shoulder the Government’s real-terms cuts without also cutting back on staff.

We have had a good debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) talked about the £3 million of cuts in real terms to his area. In his excellent speech, the Chair of the Education Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), said that we must never forget to celebrate the contribution of teachers in our classrooms. The lamp post reference from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) will probably go down in history.

The right hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (David Evennett) made a passionate and interesting speech, but he did not say why his borough will be losing £7.2 million in real terms between 2015-16 and 2020. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) made a very passionate speech indeed, and we wish her son all the best on his field trip. The hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) said there were no cuts, yet Derbyshire is losing £11.5 million from 2015-16 to 2019-20. We have seen the excellent campaign being run by Catherine Atkinson in that constituency, where Wilsthorpe school alone is going to lose £200,000.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) made another passionate speech about the impact on the poor in her constituency, in addition to her speech on housing last month. The hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) made a very good speech, and I am also an f40 representative, but he failed to point out that Dorset is losing £3.1 million from 2015-16 to 2019-20. The hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) also forgot to point out that her constituency is losing £1.5 million in the same period, but she is right about one thing: this is political. Research shows that 750,000 people changed their vote at the last general election because of school cuts, and the Government are not reversing this, so let us see what happens a week on Thursday and subsequently at the next general election.

Labour is committed to investment in our schools and investment in our pupils, while the Conservative Government offer disinvestment from our schools and our pupils. I call on all Members of the House to be a voice for pupils, a voice for parents and a voice for teachers in their constituencies and to support the motion.

3.32 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): This has been a good-natured but energetic debate—I wrote that before the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) finished his peroration. I was surprised that he did not acknowledge the 2.3% increase in funding for schools in his constituency once the national funding formula is fully implemented. Nor did the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) acknowledge the 3.5% increase in funding for schools in her constituency. No local authority is facing cuts in funding under this Government.

Since 2010, this Government have been committed to raising academic standards in our schools, improving behaviour in our schools, taking action to ensure that every local school is a good school and challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations, so that every child, regardless of their background or where they live, has the best education possible, to help them fulfil their potential.

Since 2010, despite the overarching imperative of tackling the crisis in our public finances that overshadowed our economy when we came into office, we have been able to increase school spending to record levels. This year we will be spending £42.4 billion on school and special needs funding, up from just under £41 billion last year. The new fairer national funding formula will ensure that funding is distributed more fairly and more transparently than previous Governments have dared. Every local education authority’s funding is now calculated on the basis of the actual levels of pupil need in each of the schools and academies in their area—on pupil numbers, on pupils’ age, on their level of disadvantage, on their prior educational attainment and on whether they speak English as an additional language. It is fair and transparent, and the principles it is based on have widespread support, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (David Evennett) pointed out.

I should say to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) that Warrington is seeing a 3.4% increase in funding under the national funding formula. He raised the issue of class sizes, but I point out that they have remained broadly constant, at 21 on average for secondary schools and at 27 for primary schools, despite the huge increase in the number of primary school places that we have created. I should have thought that he would congratulate us on that achievement. Pupil-teacher ratios have remained below 18.1 since 2011.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), in a typically thoughtful and well-informed speech, pointed out that teacher retention is as important as recruitment. He is right, of course, which is why we are tackling the workload issues facing the teaching profession. He is also right to defend a strong academic curriculum for children from all backgrounds, as well as emphasising the importance of creative and practical subjects. After PE and sport, music is where most Department for Education subject-specific funding is allocated.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford, in an excellent speech, pointed out that there are now 25 more “good” or “outstanding” schools in his constituency than there were in 2010. We should congratulate all the teachers in his constituency on that achievement. He was also right to highlight the total absence of any specific education policies from the Labour party in this debate.

I listened carefully to the passionate speech by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). I gently point out that schools in her constituency will receive a 4.2% funding increase under the national funding formula, and that the attainment gap between those from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more advantaged peers has closed by 10% since 2011. That is what this Government have been driving.

Emma Hardy: Will the Minister acknowledge that there is now greater demand for SEN funding, because of the increasing number of children requiring it? As I

[Emma Hardy]

mentioned in my speech, 526 children under the age of four with SEN will be starting school in Hull. He says that he has given more money, but the demand has increased to such an extent that the money per child has actually decreased.

Nick Gibb: We take the education of children with special educational needs very seriously. My hon. Friend the former Schools Minister, Ed Timpson, reformed the system and introduced education, health and care plans, which is a much more streamlined and effective way of ensuring that those children get the right care and education. The hon. Lady is right to acknowledge that that has led to increased pressure on the high needs budget, which is why we have increased it, from £5 billion in 2013 to £6 billion this year. Those are very significant sums of money.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) for bringing a dose of reality to the debate and correcting some of the points made by Opposition Members. She was right to welcome the 5% increase in schools funding for schools in her constituency under the national funding formula.

I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for pointing out that every school in her constituency is now rated “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted, including the recently inspected Harris Primary School—it was rated “outstanding”. I congratulate all the teachers in her constituency on that achievement. The Government’s overriding objective has been to ensure that every local school is a good school, so that parents can be confident when they send their children there.

Siobhain McDonagh: The Minister is aware that I am a supporter of Labour’s academisation scheme, whereby failing schools that cannot be fixed by the council became academies. The problem for my constituency and many others is that the number of good or adequate sponsors is now running out and schools are being forced to become academies, which is not always in the best interests of pupils.

Nick Gibb: I share the hon. Lady’s support for Labour’s academisation programme, which is why we expanded it from 200 academies to over 6,000. She is fortunate to have in her constituency the Harris Federation, which is one of the most successful multi-academy trusts and school sponsors in the country. She should also want to acknowledge that funding for schools in Mitcham and Morden will rise by 7.3% under the national funding formula, and that Merton will receive an extra £6.3 million by 2019-20—a 5.4% increase in funding.¹

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), in yet another highly effective speech on education, rightly pointed out that Dorset will receive a 4.2% increase and Poole a 3.8% increase under the full national funding formula. He also highlighted that England is rising up the PIRLS league table for the reading ability of our nine-year-olds. Reading is the basic fundamental building block, as the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), who is sitting on the Opposition Back Bench, would acknowledge. This country’s adoption of phonics and the hard work of

primary school teachers up and down the country mean that we have risen from joint 10th to joint eighth in the PIRLS world league table.

In her strong contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole, effectively revealed Labour’s and the unions’ political motives for raising school funding. Lewes’s schools will see a 4.3% increase in funding under the national funding formula, but I will certainly come back to her on the three requests from the primary schools in her constituency.

Although I think there is some consensus in the House about the principles underlying the national funding formula, we disagree with the Opposition on the overall amount. Is the £42.4 billion we are spending this year enough, and can our public finances afford more? Last July, we announced an additional £1.3 billion increase in overall school and high needs funding, over and above the increases agreed in the 2015 spending review—£416 million more for 2018-19 and £884 million more for 2019-20. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that school funding will be 50% higher in real terms per pupil by 2019-20 than in 2000.

However, we know that in the past two years schools have incurred increased costs, such as higher employer’s national insurance contributions and higher pensions contributions. Of course, both have applied to other public services, and higher national insurance has also applied to private sector employers. Those costs are all part of tax and revenue-raising measures that were introduced to help reduce the public sector budget deficit, which stood at £150 billion per year—10% of our GDP—when we came into office in 2010. That was unsustainable and would have been bankrupting if we had not addressed it. Thanks to the hard work of the British people and a series of difficult decisions, that deficit has reduced to £42.6 billion—2.1% of GDP—and is set to fall further.

Without that balanced approach to public spending and the public finances, we would not now have a strong economy providing young people with the job opportunities that a record number of jobs in the economy brings. Without that careful and balanced approach, we would not have been able to spend £42.4 billion on schools this year and allocate more than £23 billion to capital spending from 2016 to 2021, and we would not have created more than 800,000 new school places, with more in the pipeline; seen a rise in reading standards in our schools; helped schools raise the standard of maths teaching; allocated significant funds to music and the arts; ensured that 91% of 16-year-olds studied at least two science GCSEs, up from 62% in 2011; or seen 1.9 million more pupils in schools rated “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted than in 2010.

None of that would have been achieved if we had taken the hard left-wing approach to the public finances set out by Labour during and since the general election. Labour’s spend, spend, spend plans would mean £106 billion more public spending, wiping out in one blow eight years of hard work on deficit reduction. Its plans to nationalise a raft of industries would add £176 billion to the national debt. Its other plans would bring the increase in debt to £350 billion, costing us another £8 billion a year in higher interest charges—an amount

1. [Official Report, 22 May 2018, Vol. 641, c. 5MC.]

equal to nearly a fifth of the schools budget blown on increased debt interest charges to fund Labour's spending plans.

What do we know about Labour's statements and promises on spending? We know that they cannot be delivered without bankrupting the country. It would lead to a run on the pound, a flight of investment and a rise in unemployment—the hallmark of every period of Labour in office. That is why, no doubt, the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, in a moment of candour, described Labour's economic policy as “a bit of a” something “or bust” policy.

By contrast, because of our balanced approach to public spending, funding for schools under the national formula will ensure that every school attracts at least 0.5% more per pupil funding this year and 1% next year than in 2017, with thousands of schools receiving significantly more. It means that for schools that have historically had the very lowest funding, we can introduce a minimum of £3,500 per pupil for primary schools and £4,800 per pupil for secondary schools. It means that we can increase funding for special educational needs from £5 billion in 2013 to £6 billion this year.

Delivery, not promises, is what matters and this Government are delivering—delivering on the economy, delivering on jobs, delivering on school funding and delivering on academic standards.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the Conservative Party manifesto pledge to make sure that no school has its budget cut as a result of the new national funding formula, the statement by the Secretary of State for Education that each school will see at least a small cash terms increase and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's guarantee that every school would receive a cash terms increase; endorses the aim of ensuring that there is a cash increase in every school's budget; agrees with the UK Statistics Authority that such an increase is not guaranteed by the national funding formula, which allows for reductions of up to 1.5 per cent in per pupil funding for schools; and calls on the Government to meet its guarantee, ensuring that every single school receives a cash increase in per pupil funding in every financial year of the 2017 Parliament.

Angela Rayner: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder if you can help me with something. Earlier today, the Prime Minister said that the Leader of the Opposition had said that he would ameliorate student debt and suggested that he was no longer looking at that. That is not something that the Leader of the Opposition is not doing. Is there anything you can do, Madam Deputy Speaker, to help me correct the record to ensure that the Leader of the Opposition is represented fairly?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): That is not technically a point of order, as the hon. Lady may know. It is up to any Member of the House to correct the record if they feel that they may inadvertently have misled the House.

Social Care

3.48 pm

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

That this House notes that Government cuts to council budgets have resulted in a social care funding crisis; further notes that Government failure to deal with this crisis has pushed the funding problem on to councils and council tax payers and has further increased the funding gap for social care; is concerned that there is an unacceptable variation in the quality and availability of social care across the country with worrying levels of unmet need for social care; and calls on the Government to meet the funding gap for social care this year and for the rest of this Parliament.

It has been six months since the House called on the Government to commit the extra funding needed to ease the crisis affecting social care—six months of missed opportunities for the Government to bring more stability to our fragile social care system; six months in which the situation has deteriorated further. The care of older people and of younger people with disabilities seems sometimes to be an afterthought for this Government. The Secretary of State finally made a speech about social care in March, having had the words “social care” added to his title two months previously. Indeed, he told a conference of social workers:

“We need to do better on social care”.

This Government have had eight years to do better on social care.

The simple fact is that since 2010, things have got manifestly worse. I told the House in October that the care system, in the words of the Care Quality Commission, remains at a “tipping point”. Eight years of cuts to council budgets has meant that over £6 billion has been lost from social care budgets since 2010. The diminishing care fees that councils are able to pay in the light of those cuts have further destabilised the care sector, which is already described by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services as “perilously fragile”.

ADASS reported last year that two thirds of councils had seen care providers close in their areas and that more than 50 councils had contracts with care providers handed back to them. A major chain of care homes, Four Seasons, recently ran into financial trouble, bringing with it the threat of care home closures and uncertainty for thousands of vulnerable elderly people. A few days ago, Allied Healthcare, one of the country's biggest providers of home care, announced that it would be seeking a financial rescue plan from its creditors. Allied Healthcare has contracts with 150 councils and it cares for over 13,000 older and vulnerable people, so the Minister needs to tell the House how local authorities will be able to discharge their statutory duty to deliver care if Allied Healthcare collapses.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): On local authorities, my hon. Friend will know as well as I do that because of the cuts to local authority budgets, there is, on the one hand, bed blocking in hospitals, because local authorities do not have enough social workers to prepare a care package, and on the other, when people can go into care, care is so expensive that they cannot afford it. Councils are under pressure to try to make up the shortfall, which they cannot do.

Barbara Keeley: Indeed they cannot, and given the fragility in some of these private care providers, I wonder what on earth councils are supposed to be able to do.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): Does the shadow Minister agree that Allied Healthcare looks like the tip of the iceberg? So many care providers are contemplating getting out of the publicly provided social care market or have already done so that we run the real risk of drifting towards a situation in which people with money can get good care privately but those who do not have the money could be left without.

Barbara Keeley: That is almost the situation we are in at the moment. It is worth thinking about why we seem to have this issue with Allied Healthcare, given that the problem has occurred in the last few days. It was reported that Allied Healthcare's cash-flow problems had been triggered by increases in the national minimum wage for care staff and by an £11 million bill for back pay owed to sleep-in care staff. However, Allied Healthcare is not the only provider that is facing a large back-pay bill for care workers on shift. Learning disability social care providers have warned that they will have to withdraw services or close altogether to pay the bill for back pay, placing the care of even more people in jeopardy and putting care staff jobs at risk.

This trend of closures and contract cancellations is set to continue. A recent report into residential care by the Competition and Markets Authority painted a bleak picture of the current care home market.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I recently met Lifeways Group, which looks after thousands of people with learning disabilities and has many hundreds of staff who do sleep-in shifts. It pays above the national living wage and is a good employer, but it cannot afford the back-pay claims if the finding goes against it. Should the Government not provide the funding to support these organisations?

Barbara Keeley: It is reported, in fact, that the total back-pay bill across the social care providers that provide sleep-in cover will be about £400 million, so it is not surprising that a care provider such as Lifeways would say that. The Government have to come up with answers for this, because there has been a dragging of heels, the guidance has been very confusing, and it is a serious matter. I understand, too, that the Government have completed two reports, but they have not been made public. Hon. Members and I would certainly welcome having those reports placed in the Library so that we can get that information.

We have seen warnings from the Competition and Markets Authority that care homes would find themselves having to close or move away from local authority-funded care because the funding is now only just covering day-to-day running costs. It is quite clear from all this that there is a growing funding gap in social care that must be filled. The Local Government Association has said that our social care system needs an immediate injection of £1.3 billion to fill that gap, and this is projected to rise to £2.5 billion by 2020, according to the King's Fund.

In our last Opposition day debate on social care, in October, the strain social care was under—from the weight of growing demand, reducing supply and the

lack of funds from Government—was plain to see, but since then the system has cracked still further under the pressure of Government funding cuts.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): When elderly people fall, they often have a stay in hospital, putting additional pressures on the NHS, and when they are ready to be discharged, hospitals sometimes cannot discharge them, because local social care provision is not available. Two thirds of admissions to hospitals for falls could have been averted by early intervention in the home. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need more money for our adult social services?

Barbara Keeley: I do absolutely—and that is the point I was making. It was only when the number of delayed transfers of care hit a record high that the Government started to pay much attention to this issue. The other worry is that, as the British Red Cross has reported, in attempting to reduce the number of delayed transfers of care, hospitals often eject people before they are ready. One can see a vicious cycle of admission and readmission.

As I was saying, the system is beginning to crack. Hard-pressed councils and their associations are pleading for more funding to deal with the ever-increasing demand for social care. In December, the former president of ADASS, Margaret Willcox, said:

“The crisis facing us is so acute that we fear social care could pass the point of no return in 2018 while we wait for decisions to be made.”

The National Audit Office has warned that councils could face insolvency after using their reserves just to meet those increasing costs of social care. As well as Northamptonshire County Council being technically insolvent, we recently learned that Worcestershire County Council has a massive budgetary disparity. A report from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has warned the council that it faces a £26 million hole in its finances this year and that that would rise to £60 million in 2020, owing mainly to an increase in demand. The council chief executive, Paul Robinson, has said that

“there comes a point where cost-cutting can't go any further – there has to be a solution, and I think it has to be a national solution.”

Lord Porter, the Conservative chair of the LGA, has said to councils that:

“you can't keep dipping into your savings; sooner or later the money will run out.”

Let us think about what these cuts to social care mean for the quality of care that people receive. In the recent words of the Secretary of State himself, there is unacceptable variation in the quality of services. One in five care facilities receives the lowest quality rating from the Care Quality Commission, and Labour's own research has revealed that over 3,000 care facilities that already have the lowest quality rating continue to receive the lowest rating even after being re-inspected. Cuts mean providers have less money to pay staff or to invest in training or building renovations, which can obviously lead to their getting trapped in a cycle of poor-quality care provision, and that poor-quality care has a serious impact on the lives of people who need care.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out the very high percentage of care homes being found to be inadequate or requiring improvements—the figure is over 40% in my local authority. Does she agree that in many cases this is about care not being safe in those care settings? The real worry is not just that the settings are a bit grotty but that the care is unsafe.

Barbara Keeley: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend takes me ahead in what I was going to say, but I know she has been involved with Age UK in understanding the state of care in her own local area, and I applaud her for that. Cuts have resulted in providers giving poor-quality care, and that is having a serious impact on the lives of people who need care. It means people not being washed or going hours without receiving a meal or being given a drink; it means people being left without help to go to the toilet; and in some cases, as she just said, it means people not being given crucial medication.

Care quality has become so bad that Age UK's recent report was entitled, "Why call it care when nobody cares?" Many Members went to the launch of the report and listened to the older carers who were there. The anger of those older carers who spoke at or attended the event was palpable. Some told me that they and their families were often at breaking point, that they felt betrayed by a system of care that left them with little or no affordable support, and that they faced rising care costs which they described as crippling, although the care for which they paid was often not good enough.

I know that the Minister was present at that event. She may have talked to one carer there, Elaine from Northamptonshire, whose council is battling insolvency. Elaine gave up her job to care and has cared full-time for her husband ever since, but rather than giving her any extra help, the council recently tried to increase the weekly cost of care support at home from £88 to £178 per week. That was another battle for a carer to fight to obtain the care support that she needed at a price that she and her husband could afford.

Labour Members recognise that unpaid family carers need more support. We understand how much families are doing to look after their family members, and how hard that is for many carers but the Government have not even developed an updated national strategy for carers, having scrapped the planned strategy back in October. Since then, they have even failed to publish the action plan that was promised for January. What does that say about their attitude to carers?

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The motion states that

"there is an unacceptable variation in the quality and availability of social care".

Where in the country does the hon. Lady think it is really good at the moment?

Barbara Keeley: It tends to be outstanding in the independent sector. Charities in particular can be outstanding, although they are not always so.

The care sector's funding crisis also has an impact on the growing number of people who need care but are given none at all. More than 1.2 million people are now living with unmet care needs, many of them isolated and lonely, and that number rises to 1.5 million with the

addition of people who need assistance with taking medication. Unmet needs can lead to people being forced to wear incontinence pads overnight because there is no one to help them to get to the toilet, which takes away their dignity. The number of older people living with unmet care needs will inevitably rise without an injection of new funding, because of the growing demand for care in our ageing population.

It is clear that the social care system needs sustainable funding from central Government, but the Government's response to the crisis so far has been to push the funding problem on to hard-pressed councils and council tax payers through the social care levy. The only increase in Government funding has been the paltry £150 million extra for social care in the local government finance settlement. That is nowhere near enough to avert the crisis that the Government have created in social care. Moreover, it was not the new money that councils desperately needed. The Government admitted that the increase would be funded through an expected underspend in existing departmental budgets.

It is clear that local authorities are now facing some of their greatest challenges just to make ends meet. I want to highlight the heroic efforts of Labour councils to protect adult social care in the face of swingeing budget cuts from the Government.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): My hon. Friend has referred to Labour councils. In each of the last two years, my local authority, Bolton Council, has had to increase its council tax rates by 3% and 2% respectively in order to fund social care, and it will have to increase them next year as well. It has had a shortfall of £6 million, and has been able to cover it only by increasing council tax, which is really not acceptable.

Barbara Keeley: Indeed. As I have said, the Government have pushed the problem on to councils, which have been forced to use their reserves, and pushed the council on to council tax payers, who have had to pay the levy.

I was talking about the heroic efforts of some councils. Despite budget cuts, which are now running at between 40% and 50%, my local authority, Salford City Council, and neighbouring Manchester City Council have acted to ensure that care providers with which they contract will pay care staff a real living wage, and I know that Labour councils in Lambeth, Southwark and many other London boroughs have committed themselves to paying their care staff the London living wage.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): As my hon. Friend is mentioning many councils, may I draw her attention to the work of Bristol City Council under Councillor Helen Holland? It is leading an important Proud to Care campaign to encourage more care workers back into sector, particularly at a time of increasing demand and labour shortages. Will she join me in commending Bristol City Council's work in this area?

Barbara Keeley: I will indeed, because given the cuts that many councils have been facing—I am sure Bristol is the same—these efforts to protect care services are really excellent.

I was talking about those London boroughs that have committed to pay care staff the London living wage, which, at £10.20 an hour, is way above the Government's

[Barbara Keeley]

so-called living wage of £7.83—a commitment that is no small undertaking. That is a further example of the good that Labour-run councils are doing for the most vulnerable people in their communities. We on this side of the House—this ties in very much with the point that my hon. Friend has just made—see the need for social care to be valued as a career. At last year's general election, Labour pledged to implement the real living wage for all care staff and to ensure that care staff were paid for travel time, that 15-minute care visits were scrapped and that zero-hours contracts were ended for care staff. Those are important steps, but we know that we have to go much further if we are to improve care quality.

It is clear from the reports of the Care Quality Commission that staffing levels are still a major issue in those care services rated as inadequate or requiring improvement. Much of the care workforce are underpaid, undervalued and overworked, which leads to high turnover and vacancy rates in the sector among care staff and, more importantly, the registered managers who are responsible for overseeing care quality. Improving pay for care staff will help with that, but we also need to commit to improving care staffing levels to reduce the workload pressure and offer better training and career paths.

The National Audit Office has criticised the Government for failing to have an up-to-date workforce strategy for the care sector and for their lack of oversight of workforce planning in local areas. Indeed, the Government have no major workforce strategy for social care. It was the Labour Government who produced the last strategy, in 2009. The head of the National Audit Office has said:

“Social care cannot continue as a Cinderella service—without a valued and rewarded workforce, adult social care cannot fulfil its crucial role of supporting elderly and vulnerable people in society.”

Skills for Care has a budget of only £21 million for care staff training, whereas Health Education England has a budget of £4.7 billion. That disparity in budgets between health and social care says it all about the Government's lack of priority for improving the quality of social care.

At the 2017 election, Labour pledged an extra £8 billion for social care across this Parliament, with an extra £1 billion to ease the crisis in social care this year. That aimed to relieve the pressure on the social care system. It would have been enough to begin paying care staff the real living wage and would have sought to offer more publicly funded care packages for people with different levels of need. Today's debate is not primarily about the long-term funding of social care, but Labour has made it clear that maintaining the current funding system is not an option in the long term. Recently, polling by the Alzheimer's Society has shown that paying for social care is a growing public concern and that there is overwhelming public support for a cap on care costs. The next Labour Government will implement a lower cap on care costs than the cap set under the Care Act 2014. We will also raise the asset threshold to a higher level than under the current system.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I am listening with interest to the hon. Lady's opening remarks. I am obviously interested in the cap, in paying care workers more and in raising the threshold, but how would a Labour Government pay for that?

Barbara Keeley: I think there must be an echo, because the hon. Lady asked me exactly the same question in the last debate, six months ago. I said to her previously that there is a range of options that we could use to raise the money, including wealth taxes, an employer care contribution and a social care levy. However, it really is a bit rich of Government Members to raise that question when they have no idea whatsoever how they would take forward any social care developments. Furthermore, there was absolutely nothing in the Conservative party's election campaign last year about the funding for anything. We had a costing document. We had a costed manifesto. I can stand here and say that we had the funding to put £8 billion extra into social care in this Parliament, including £1 billion this year. The Conservative party said nothing whatsoever about that.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con) *rose*—

Barbara Keeley: I will not give way—I need to move on. When the Minister responds to the debate, she can tell us what the Conservative party is aiming to do, but I am afraid that there has been a complete cloud of obfuscation.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Barbara Keeley: No, I need to move on. The Deputy Speaker has asked me not to take too long, and not take too many interventions. I have been very generous up to this point.

We believe that the time to act on this care crisis is now, but instead of taking the bold steps needed to fix the crisis, this Government are promising a Green Paper. Since the royal commission first reported on the long-term funding for the care of older people in 1999, we have seen 12 consultations and four independent reviews, so I really question why the Government are undertaking yet another consultation and producing yet another Green Paper. It is clear that they have become increasingly fond of consultations, reviews and Green Papers. In fact, they have launched more than 1,600 consultations since 2015, and more than 500 of them have not yet been completed. Sadly, I have to say that that includes the carers strategy. The Government spent £1 million on the Dilnot review, only to delay the introduction of its recommended care cap before shelving it indefinitely. The Government are wasting time and public money on consultations, and even more on adopting then shelving long-term funding solutions for social care.

The time to act is now. I urge the Government to give our social care system the funding it so badly needs, both this year and in the longer term, and I urge hon. Members to support our motion tonight. We must give councils the proper funding to deliver the high-quality care that people across this country need to live with dignity. That is nothing less than they deserve.

4.11 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I thank the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) for introducing the debate. We want this to be the best country in the world in which to grow old and in which people can face their third age knowing that they will be supported to live healthy, independent lives for longer and for as long as possible, with a choice of

good-quality, affordable care that is there, should they need it. Today's debate is a welcome opportunity to cover the action that this Government have taken to improve social care, highlighting a few examples where real progress has been made, as well as discussing our longer-term plans for the Green Paper, which will be published later this summer.

Most of all, however, I want to do something that the hon. Lady forgot to do, which is pay tribute to the extraordinary people—both the social care workforce and the informal carers—who play such a vital part in our health and social care system. At the heart of their endeavours is the commitment to do all they can to support individuals and families throughout the country.

Barbara Keeley: The Minister has just said that I did not pay tribute to informal carers. That is just not true. Everybody who knows me knows that I have never stopped paying tribute to informal carers, and I did so in my speech today. Please will the Minister not attribute comments to me that I did not make?

Caroline Dinanage: What I actually said was that the hon. Lady forgot to pay tribute to the social care workforce, who play such a vital part in our health and social care system. At the heart of their endeavours is the commitment to do all they can to support individuals and families throughout the country to live healthier lives with comfort, dignity and respect. However, it is absolutely right to begin by acknowledging that this sector has been through some really difficult times.

Norman Lamb: The hon. Lady is right to pay tribute to informal carers, and indeed to paid carers, but does she not feel uncomfortable with the fact that she and all her colleagues on the Conservative side legislated with us to introduce a cap, committed in 2015 to implement the cap, then abandoned it, thus abandoning the very informal carers she says she cares so much about?

Caroline Dinanage: We have not abandoned the cap. The Prime Minister said very clearly that we would continue to consult on the cap, and that will come forward as part of our plans for the Green Paper later in the year. We in this Chamber often hear about Labour's recession and how it led to some hard decisions about public spending to get the country back on track, but we often forget—

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op) rose—

Caroline Dinanage: Let me make a little progress, then I will happily take the hon. Lady's intervention.

We often forget that we inherited not only difficult spending choices but a social care system that was on its knees because successive Governments—not just Labour—had failed to act. Labour acknowledged the problem in its 1997 manifesto, promising to find a solution. However, 13 years later, after one royal commission, two Green Papers and the 2007 spending review pledging to address the situation, Labour left office without delivering it. Worse than that, by the time Labour left office, despite the booming economy, council tax had doubled and every year 45,000 older people were forced to sell their home to pay for residential care costs.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Let us get back to the present day, because that is what we are debating. Disabled people of working age make up more than half of adult social care users. Given that the UN condemned the Government's breaches of the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly article 19 on independent living, what does the Minister estimate to be the impact on independent living for disabled people of the cuts to social care?

Caroline Dinanage: If the hon. Lady will bear with me, I will come on to discuss that, but there will be a separate, parallel workstream on working-age adults, who account for over half of the spending—

Barbara Keeley: Why?

Caroline Dinanage: If the hon. Lady will give me the courtesy of allowing me to finish my comments, I will explain why in a moment.

The hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) wondered why we are going back to the past and looking at Labour's record, but Labour is asking people up and down the country to vote for them in the local elections, so they will rightly look at Labour's record and at how it dealt with the social care crisis when it was in government. After 13 years of inactivity and bluster, people need to be able to make a choice based on historically accurate facts.

Barbara Keeley: Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinanage: The hon. Lady had plenty of time to make her comments, so I will make a little progress.

When the Conservative party formed the coalition Government in 2010, it is worth remembering that not only did we have to deal with the parlous state of the country's finances, but we inherited a burning platform of social care. Of course, that meant taking difficult decisions in those early years, which were challenging times for local authorities.

Karin Smyth: Will the Minister give way on the cap?

Caroline Dinanage: I will be coming on to the cap later.

To give the Labour party its due, it recognised that we had difficult decisions to make. Had Labour stayed in government, it planned £52 billion-worth of cuts to local government budgets by 2015. However—enough of the history lessons—I intend to make progress and answer many of the shadow Minister's questions.

Several hon. Members rose—

Caroline Dinanage: If hon. Members will bear with me, I will now make some progress.

The tough spending choices that we have made have paid dividends, meaning that we have turned a corner in recent years. That is why local government will be able to increase spending on adult social care in real terms in each of the next three years. Our population is growing, ageing and diversifying. At the same time, the money, means and methods that we deploy to serve their long-term health and care needs are under increasing pressure to deliver, and we need to address those issues now.

[*Caroline Dineneage*]

There is recognition across the House that even if we had an infinite amount of money to fix the problem, the system would need reform. We are taking steps to make the system more effective and to ensure that it better serves the needs of vulnerable people and society in general. That is why this summer's Green Paper will complement those measures and ensure that our social care system is placed on a sustainable footing and will serve this nation for generations to come.

The Secretary of State recently outlined the seven key principles guiding our thinking on social care as we approach the Green Paper: quality, whole-person integrated care; control; workforce; supporting families and carers; a sustainable funding model for social care; and security for all. As I have said, this is not just about older people. The Green Paper will cover a range of issues that are common to all adults with care and support needs, but we are committed ensuring that any issues relating to social care that are specific to adults of working age are identified and given the right focus. Work on that is being led jointly by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

I will reflect on some of the Green Paper's themes, but first I will highlight a couple of areas where real progress has been made. I have said that we know there is growing pressure on local authorities' finances, but it simply is not true that this Government are failing to deal with or acknowledge the crisis.

Yasmin Qureshi: The Minister talks about trying to use finances appropriately. My local council has had a 54% cut to the funding that it receives from central Government, which is why it has a shortfall in funding for social care.

The Government have been able to find money to cut corporation tax, capital gains tax and inheritance tax, as well as £1 billion for the Democratic Unionist party. Are they really saying this is all about austerity and choices? Is it not really that the Government have different priorities from the Opposition?

Caroline Dineneage: I can honestly say with my hand on my heart that the Labour party does not have a monopoly on care or kindness.

I mentioned earlier that local authorities will receive a real-terms, above-inflation increase in their funding profile. We have announced significant dedicated funding for social care. The Opposition regularly seem to forget that we allocated an additional £2 billion to social care only a year ago, with a further £150 million this year. That means councils have access to £9.4 billion of dedicated funding.

Thelma Walker: Kirklees Council has had its funding cut by central Government by nearly £200 million. This year, it has raised its council tax by 5.9% to help pay for services. The three percentage points for social care come to £4.8 million, but there is a shortfall of £12 million a year. Can the Minister tell councillors where the rest of the money for social care should come from?

Caroline Dineneage: We are looking at the long-term sustainability of adult social care funding, and there will be more news in the Green Paper later this year.

The last Labour Government had 13 years without dealing with the here and now, so I will take no lessons from them.

Several hon. Members rose—

Caroline Dineneage: I will make a bit of progress.

The shadow Minister asked about Allied Healthcare. She is right to raise that, and I am grateful that she has done so. As she said, Allied Healthcare announced last Thursday that it is proposing a company voluntary arrangement to its creditors. I want to talk about that specifically because people across the country will be concerned. I spoke to the chief executive officer last Thursday to emphasise the importance of continuity of care for everyone receiving its services, both in adult social care and primary care, and the company has made it clear that those who receive services from Allied Healthcare will continue to receive the same level of care and that their care plans will not change.

Barbara Keeley: I am glad the Minister has responded in that way, but I asked her how she would ensure that 150 councils can fulfil their statutory duty to provide care if that company goes bust. We need to know a bit more than that she has had verbal reassurance. Of course the chief executive, in his current position, will try to give her verbal reassurance but, under the CVA, the creditors have to be satisfied within four weeks. What is going to happen if this company goes bust? Is it going to be another Southern Cross?

Caroline Dineneage: I am happy to answer the hon. Lady's questions, which she is right to ask. Although we are very hopeful that this procedure will have a positive result, we are taking steps to ensure we are prepared for all eventualities. The Care Quality Commission and my Department are monitoring the situation, and the CQC will notify local authorities in the event it considers it likely that services will be disrupted as a result of business failure. The law means that local authorities will step in to meet individuals' care and support needs if a care provider business fails and its services are disrupted. The relevant local authorities are working up contingency plans to ensure individuals' care and support needs continue to be met.

While the long-term options are being resolved, it is right that funding for social care comes from a variety of sources, including business rates, general taxation and the social care precept. Delayed transfers of care is one area where that money is clearly making a difference. This Government are clear that no one should stay in a hospital bed for longer than is necessary; doing this removes people's dignity, reduces their quality of life and leads to poorer health and care outcomes.

Maria Caulfield: My local East Sussex County Council is a rural authority, so for decades it has had 49% less funding per head of population, yet it has had the same pressures as the areas represented by Opposition Members. By working together with health services, my council has reduced delayed discharges by 38%. Will the Minister welcome the hard work of East Sussex County Council?

Caroline Dineneage: I do welcome it. I recognise the very hard work of local councils that have managed to reduce delayed transfers of care. Indeed, I also recognise

the very hard-working NHS staff, such as my hon. Friend, who have also helped to make that a reality.

We know that the NHS is busier than ever before, with hospital admissions rising by 33% since 2007, yet we have set clear expectations for reducing delayed discharges. Despite these challenging circumstances, both the NHS and social care have been working hard to free up beds. Since February 2017, more than 1,600 beds per day have been freed up nationally. I need slightly to take exception to the way the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South described people being discharged before they are medically fit. If someone is experiencing a transfer of care that has been delayed, it is because a multi-agency team have already assessed them as being medically fit for discharge.

John Redwood: Following on from the point about the big variations in how much per head councils get, may I point out that some time ago West Berkshire and Wokingham were cut back because they were very efficient and doing a good job? Will the Minister make sure that in the new formula good conduct is taken into account and does not lead to penalties?

Caroline Dinanage: I will certainly take that into consideration.

Barbara Keeley: The Minister is just proving that she was not listening to what I was saying. What I said was that the British Red Cross has said that it had found innumerable cases where discharges have happened so quickly that people were discharged without the right amount of care, and that can just lead to a cycle of readmission. A constituent told me that, in the case of Salford Royal, which is an excellent hospital, she felt she had been “thrown out of hospital.” That is what she told me.

Caroline Dinanage: I very much thank the hon. Lady for that clarification.

Our funding increases have gone into initiatives such as the better care fund, which provides a mechanism for local authorities and clinical commissioning groups to pool budgets for the purposes of integrated care.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinanage: I hope my hon. Friend will not mind, but I want to make a little progress. The fund has helped to join up health and care services so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.

Another area where we have made significant progress is quality and safeguarding. The Care Act 2014 placed adult safeguarding on a statutory footing for the first time and established a national threshold that defines the care needs that local authorities must meet. This eliminates the postcode lottery of eligibility across England. Last year, local authorities in England advised more than 500,000 people how to access services to meet their care needs—this includes services provided by leisure, housing, transport and care providers, as well as voluntary groups.

Everyone is entitled to, and deserves, quality care, and we are working to improve the terms and conditions for people accessing care, to ensure that their rights are protected.

Norman Lamb: On the sleep-in allowance, is it reasonable to expect providers to fund these back-pay claims, given that at the time the liability was incurred commissioners and providers entered contracts on the basis of what the Government said was right in terms of the minimum wage? When the Government change the position, surely it is not fair on organisations, private or third sector, retrospectively to expect them to pay.

Caroline Dinanage: I understand and share the right hon. Gentleman's concerns on sleep-ins, and will be addressing this a little later in my comments.

We have established adult safeguarding boards to help to protect vulnerable adults in our society from abuse or exploitation. They can also act as an important source of advice and assistance for those using the adult safeguarding system. This Government also introduced the toughest system of care home inspection in the world. Eighty-one per cent. of adult social care providers are good or outstanding according to the CQC, which is a testament to the many hard-working and committed professionals working in care, to whom we owe a huge debt of gratitude. The CQC regime is already having a positive impact and 82% of providers who are rated as inadequate go on to improve.

Regardless of that, there is too much variation in the quality of care. Neighbouring local authorities can have radically different success rates on care quality and we are taking steps to address that. We are working with the adult social care sector to implement Quality Matters, a shared commitment to take action to achieve high-quality adult social care for service users, families, carers and everyone working in the sector.

We welcome the Competition and Market Authority's recent market study on care homes. It makes difficult reading, but we have welcomed it and as part of developing the Green Paper the Government are carefully looking at all the issues identified. What is more, we have published a package of measures to improve consumer protections in the social care sector after the CMA raised concerns about unfair consumer practices in homes, including the charging of unfair fees to residents and the lack of contractual and pricing transparency.

Those measures, which include working alongside industry to develop model contracts and supporting the CQC to better hold providers to account, aim to put the power back into the hands of residents and their families. We are clear, however, that if improvements are not seen we will look to change the law to strengthen protections so that people can be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

That leads me to the third aspect on which I want to focus. Ultimately, the social care workforce are the backbone of the care sector. We know that there are challenges and that is why we need to ensure that they are supported to deliver the best-quality care now and in the future. Part of that endeavour involves respecting not only the compassion and dedication of care workers but the vast range of skills they have. Alongside social workers, occupational therapists and nurses, we have many care workers who could benefit from or be inspired

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

by new career progression ladders. We need to ensure that we have enough people within all those skilled roles to support individuals and families in living their best possible lives. That means ensuring that new routes into social care professions have as much variety and value as those developed by the NHS. Apprenticeships are part of that story. I am proud that in 2016-17 more than 90,000 social care apprentices began their training. That is up more than 40,000 compared with in 2010.

Of course, pay remains a constant and often emotive issue. Care workers deserve a wage that reflects the true value of their work. The national living wage is, in part, a reaction to that and the average salary for a care worker in the independent sector has gone up by 4%, with those full-time staff on the minimum wage seeing a pay rise of up to £2,000 since 2015. We are not complacent about the economic pressures faced by many in the system, but that is a good place to start.

A couple of hon. Members have spoken about sleep-ins and they are absolutely right to raise that. The Government are committed to creating an economy that works for everyone, ensuring that workers are paid fairly according to the law, including through the national minimum wage, but we recognise the pressure that has been placed on the sleep-in sector by historic liabilities for back pay. We are carefully exploring options to minimise any impact on the sector caused by this and have been engaging with the European Commission to ensure that any response would be legal. The Government will continue to work with representatives of the social care sector to strengthen the evidence base, building on the work we began over the summer. I will, of course, keep the House informed when we have made progress.

There are thousands of care workers in England, and we need many more, but it is true that we already have hundreds of thousands of carers out there—the unpaid hidden army of family, friends and community volunteers without whom the system would simply grind to a halt. We know that about 60% of us are likely to become carers at some stage in our lives. As it is today, one in eight of the adult population is a carer. That is why carers will be a fundamental part of the Green Paper. A sustainable settlement for social care will simply not be possible without focusing on the support we provide to them. Ahead of the Green Paper's publication, we will shortly publish an action plan on carers, setting out a cross-Government programme of targeted work to support carers over the next couple of years.

Another principle that the Secretary of State has spoken about in the context of the Green Paper is control. We know that the greater control people have over their care, the better the outcomes. The only people who have a specific right to have a personal health budget are adults in receipt of NHS continuing healthcare or children receiving continuing care, which is why earlier this month we launched a consultation on extending the right to personal health budgets and integrated personal budgets to achieve better outcomes for those with the greatest ongoing social care needs as well as health needs. Those are some of the principles that are guiding the Green Paper. The goal is that, whatever a person's age, they can be confident in our care and support system, not just for their own health and care needs but for those of the people close to them.

Karin Smyth: The 2015 Tory manifesto was very clear on the commitment and the assurances about the cap. The 2017 manifesto abandoned that. I think the Minister said earlier that it is still part of the Government's considerations. Will she clarify from the Dispatch Box today what we are to expect in the Green Paper with regard to the cap?

Caroline Dinenage: The Prime Minister said last year in the general election that we would be consulting on the cap in due course and that will be part of the Green Paper. Building a sustainable care and support system will require some big decisions, but getting this right promises a better system in which everyone can have confidence, where people understand their responsibilities, can prepare for their future and know that the care that they receive will be to a high standard and help them to maintain their independence and well-being. The paper will set out options to put the social care system on a more secure footing and address issues to improve the quality of care and reduce the variation in practice.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before I call the Scottish National party spokesperson, I should inform colleagues that we have about 17 people who wish to participate in this debate. I do not want to impose a time limit, which means that I require some discipline. I suggest that if hon. and right hon. Members confine their speeches to about seven minutes, we might not have to impose a time limit.

4.35 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): It seems no time since we were discussing this topic in the autumn. There are three groups of people who require social care. The first and the one commonly thought about are the frail elderly. There is expected to be a rise of 25% in those aged 85 and above between 2015 and 2025. By 2030, that proportion will have gone up 63%. Therefore, this requires us to make urgent preparations. Elderly people requiring social care need support and comfort.

The next group comprises those who are facing the end of life. They want dignity and, if possible, to be at home. If their family is looking after them, they want their family to have respite. The third group, as has already been mentioned in the debate, are younger people with disability. For them, it is the quality of their whole life, their mobility and their ability to participate in society. This last group is expected to rise by 9.2% between 2010 and 2020.

The five year forward view for the NHS and the amount of money requested were based on a game-changing approach to public health and a strong increase in social care funding. In actual fact, the opposite has happened and social care has lost almost £5 billion. Age UK says that 1.2 million elderly people have a social care need that is not being met—up 48% since 2010. In England, there has been a 26% drop in local authority-funded patients getting social care—that is 400,000 people—despite an increase in the ageing population.

One third of the elderly population are looked after by their family. Those carers have been paid tributes here, but they need a bit more than tributes; they need support and, in particular, they need respite, because

many of them are literally working all the hours of the week. There will be 2 million carers who are themselves over 65. At the moment, carers' allowance is only £60 a week; it is not even the same as the jobseeker's allowance. In Scotland, this is one of the benefits that we now have control over, and it is rising to meet the level of the jobseeker's allowance. That is little enough tribute to these people who, frankly, are saving the state millions.

Some 700,000 people were identified by Age UK as getting no help whatsoever. The Green Paper is looking at options in the long term, but the problem is that social care needs funding now, and it is estimated that the gap will be £2 billion by 2020. The social care precept has been identified, allowing local authorities to raise council tax by 2% to 3% over the next few years. That will bring in £1.8 billion, but it will be the richer areas that will be able to raise more money.

The better care fund has been put forward for the integration of health and social care, which we should all welcome. It is estimated to raise £1.5 billion by 2019-20. The problem is that some of it—£800 million—has been raided from the new homes bonus, and when we are not here talking about social care, people are at the Dispatch Box talking about the lack of housing and the lack of affordable housing. The problem is that if we do not get away from silo thinking, we will never reach a point of health in all policies.

At the same time, the local authority funding grant will be cut by £6.1 billion by 2019-20, so we are talking about giving with one hand and taking away with the other. As has been touched on, the cuts to local authority funding of social care are causing providers to close. In the first half of 2016, one third of local authorities had at least one home care provider—and half had a care home or nursing home—that closed due to becoming bankrupt. Anyone who has had a relative supported by these services will know how traumatic it is, particularly if it is a residential care home, for someone who may have lived somewhere for years suddenly to be moved to a strange place.

Perhaps some consideration should be given in the Green Paper to combining health and social care, and to looking at some of the different approaches in order to consider whether it is actually safer to provide social care publicly. In Scotland, we have been increasing the funding into the community in primary care, which will rise to 11% of the health budget, and in mental health, community care and social care. The aim is to rebalance the budget over the coming years to 2021 until half the health budget is going to the community. We have been funding integration joint boards since 2014, and the care, design and planning is by health and social care partnerships. This is already joining up health and social care, so that we do not have the situation that I experienced when I worked in a hospital, with the social care side and the health side bickering over where Mrs Jones would be best served. With integration, we should just be able to work out what is best for Mrs Jones.

Norman Lamb: From what the hon. Lady is saying, I get the impression that she rather agrees with me that the Government will never come up with a solution by focusing in their Green Paper on one part of one part of the problem—in other words, older adult social care. We need to look at the whole system across the NHS and social care.

Dr Whitford: I utterly agree. Obviously, we recognise the change in title of the Secretary of State. I am sure that many of us across the House hope that that would mean a move towards a more joined-up approach to health and social care. The pressure on the NHS is absolutely exacerbated by problems in social care.

Kate Green: There is an inconsistency between funding through continuing healthcare as part of NHS provision and the funding that is available to support people through social care. Does the hon. Lady intend to suggest that that discrepancy should in some way be rectified so that there is not a difference between the routes through which someone comes into the care system?

Dr Whitford: Many relatives and patients complain about the fact that, depending on which illness people have towards the end of their life, they will either be supported in an NHS or hospice system or they will pay for it in the social care system. A fragmentation has resulted from the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the change in structure. Someone's treatment may be delivered under NHS England as a specialist service for so many days, but then they go back to the clinical commissioning group and the ongoing care is suddenly not there. It is all very disjointed. In actual fact, we require an entire approach that joins up health and social care for the entire patient pathway. We should not expect patients to navigate from one pothole to the next.

We have exactly the same challenges with an ageing population. Indeed, the Scottish population is older and ageing more quickly than the English population. In all these debates, I always say that we must not look on this as a catastrophe. Having spent over 30 years of my life trying to get people to live longer, I ask Members to remember the alternative—living shorter. However, without public health changes and a game-changing approach, we are not ageing well; and we need to age well. But that will take a long time to turn around. We need to look after the people who require care right now.

Having failures in social care traps people in hospital. In Scotland, although we have a long way to go as well, delayed discharges from hospital have dropped in every year since 2014, when the integration started. Between 2010 and 2017, the average hours delivered through home care have doubled from six to 12 per week. In future, a quarter of us will die in a care home, so what kind of quality of care do we want to have, and what kinds of palliative care skills would we like our nursing homes and care homes to have? We need to create links between the hospice movement and care homes so that those skills and that supportive approach are shared.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): The hon. Lady's dedication and work in the NHS knows no bounds. One of the things that no one has touched on is the absolutely vital importance of aids and adaptations that allow people to go home and have social care, or even have their family provide care. Often one of the major problems with delayed discharge is the lack of access to those adaptations—the commodes, the hoists, the hospital beds and the walk-in showers that people need in their home. Does she recognise that that is one of things that nobody is talking about that we must get right, and that money must be put in to make it possible?

Dr Whitford: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. In my years of working particularly as a breast cancer surgeon, where I was involved in the palliative care of my own patients, we often met that as a barrier. We started to have the fast response teams who could get hold of hospital beds and commodes and get the changes done, particularly for somebody who actually might not have very long to live.

Since 2015, those who are defined by their medical care team as being in the terminal phase of an illness, whether it is cancer, motor neurone disease or another condition, have not been charged for personal care or nursing care at home. This means that they are not delayed by means-testing, which is another thing that can end up keeping a terminal patient stuck in hospital for weeks and weeks that frankly they just cannot spare.

Younger people with disability have been mentioned. In England, approximately half of local authority spend, and in Scotland approximately 40%, is for the working-age disabled. However, Scope, a charity involved with those with disability, says that two thirds of those who applied to local authorities for care were offered no help and were simply signposted to other charities. The 83% who were given some care felt that they did not get enough hours for it to support them sufficiently.

When we discussed social care in October, I mentioned that in Scotland we were hoping to pass Frank's law, which is in honour of Frank Kopel—a footballer who played for Man Utd and Dundee Utd and who, possibly related to heading the ball, developed dementia at a very young age. I am glad to report that this law has now been passed. Starting from April next year, those under 65 with degenerative, chronic and eventually terminal illnesses will also be able to have personal care, and this will simply be needs-based, as it is for those over 65. I pay tribute to his widow, Amanda, who fought for a very long time to raise the issue of people who are being excluded from care based on precisely when their date of birth is. However, the Scottish Government are trying to clarify with the Department for Work and Pensions whether providing this additional free personal care to someone under 65 will not result in cuts to their disability benefits, because to give with one hand and have it taken away with the other would be tragic.

The UK Government's Green Paper provides a chance to step back and rethink care. Obviously, the aim is to achieve sustainable care—as I say, perhaps to look at more radical considerations such as combining it with health and not having it as an utterly separate system.

On those who are younger with disability, the Minister talked about a parallel workstream for the under-65s. What are the terms of reference for that? What can people with disability expect?

After the complete shambles of the 2017 manifesto, it is crucial that there are no sudden changes or things that catch people out, with no notice to prepare for what they might have to pay for care. This is something that will affect people in the future. We have all debated the WASPI women in this place. Let us not create a new tragedy of people who are trapped by some sudden change in how social care works.

As the Minister said, the workforce are absolutely key to the care service. This is a service that is utterly delivered by people. It is not high-technology or machines,

and by and large, it is not hospitals. In Scotland, the homecare workforce has risen by 11% over the last three years, but all care providers are reporting that they are struggling to recruit, and all of them see that Brexit will make that much worse, because colleagues who have come from Europe, and particularly eastern Europe, make up a significant proportion of our social care workforce.

We need to value carers. They have often been treated far too much as a cheap workforce, and that says to people, "This is not a profession or a job to stay in long term. This is until you get something better."

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): There are of course also carers who are not employed. I came across kinship carers in Hartlepool. Does the hon. Lady agree that kinship carers, and in particular those who receive no benefits, should also feature in this debate?

Dr Whitford: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. There are all sorts of aspects to the provision of care, for whichever age group or needs, and the Green Paper will fail if it does not result in us stepping back and taking a wider view.

It is important to pay the real living wage, which the Scottish Government already support and fund, and not the national living wage. All hours should be paid—that commitment is being consulted on in Scotland at the moment—and that should include travel as well as overnight care.

For local authorities that have social care within their service, this is the biggest driver of the gender pay gap. Men who empty the bins are paid considerably more than the women who are caring for our grandparents. We should think of job satisfaction and give them the time to care, not 15 minutes. We should think of continuity for both the patient and the carer, but particularly we need to think of the career structure and the training. Caring needs to be a profession, and a profession that is respected.

4.52 pm

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). I think the Opposition are quite right to want to debate this issue, and I also think strongly that the long-term solution to the problem of funding care—particularly for the frail elderly—will require cross-party agreement, so I hope that the debate can take place in a relatively non-partisan way.

I agree with the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) that radical change is needed, but I gently put it to her and her colleagues that in this long-term and complex area, indignation is not enough. Simply saying, "We must spend more money," at the same time as saying, "But we must restrict the amount of money we take from other people," which I understood to be the import of part of her speech, does not cut it.

Norman Lamb: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Damian Green: I will certainly give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a moment, because I am about to mention him, but I am conscious of time.

There needs to be radical change, and the Green Paper needs to be radical and brave, because although in this debate, as in the wider debate on this issue, a lot of people talk about the fact that we live in an ageing society, we have not remotely adjusted as a society to what that means yet. Our population is projected to grow by around 10 million over the next 40 years. Almost all that growth comes from older people, and particularly those in the oldest age group. There are 5.3 million people over 75 in Britain today. That number will double to more than 10 million in 40 years. This is not just a looming problem; it is a problem today. There is a short-term and a long-term problem to solve. Frankly, in the spirit of non-partisanship, no party has a record unblemished by using social care as a political football. Phrases such as “death tax” or “dementia tax” make good copy and can affect the outcome of elections, but they do not help rational debate or, more importantly, help us improve the lot of the increasing millions of older people.

Barbara Keeley: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman is admonishing his own Chancellor, who used the expression “death tax” in the last Budget.

Damian Green: I think that the phrase “death tax” dates back to the previous Labour Government’s attempt to solve the problem in 2008, and I am sure that the hon. Lady used the phrase “dementia tax” during the last general election campaign. I hope that she will reciprocate my attempt to be non-partisan—so far it does not feel like it.

In the short term, the challenge for the Government is one of capacity and quality of care. Both problems will become more difficult in the long term. There is a range of things that we must do as a society before people need social care. For example, we need to keep people active for longer, we need to keep them in the workforce for longer, because that is good for their health, and we need to make changes to the planning system so that we can keep them in appropriate housing of their own for longer. In the end, however, the nub of the issue will be funding.

I want to address a point raised by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire about joining the whole thing up with health funding. I agree with the broad thrust of the 10 principles proposed by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) yesterday, particularly the idea of hypothecation, whose time is coming, but I think there is a problem with the idea of simply integrating all health funding and all social care funding.

It is a no-brainer that, organisationally, social care and healthcare need to be much better integrated, so that the individual is not trying to negotiate a very complex system, as the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire said. If we simply roll all the funding together into one pot, however—a sort of national health and social care fund—there are two serious dangers. The first is that social care takes over from mental health as the Cinderella of the health system, never quite at the top of the priority list when money is allocated. The second is that nobody feels that their contribution is related to their personal needs. The effect is that some of the sources of funding that could be made available—I agree with

all those who say we need more funding—such as the £1.7 trillion of equity in residential property, of which more than two thirds is held by the over-65s, would be in danger of being permanently excluded, which I think would be a great mistake.

Norman Lamb: The right hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful and reasonable contribution. He suggests that if there was a completely combined united funding stream for health and social care, social care would be relegated and disadvantaged. Of course, social care already loses out here and now—under Labour, the coalition and the Conservatives—compared with NHS funding. He complained about people just using indignation, and he made the case for cross-party working. Does he share my frustration that those of us who have tried to make the case for working together are constantly rebuffed by the Government? Will he join us in pressing the Prime Minister actually to engage in this, so that we can make it a reality?

Damian Green: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that cross-party working is necessary. I gently point out that when I was a member of the Government, I met him and the hon. Member for Leicester West in a cross-party group to discuss precisely this—I was responsible for this policy area at the time—because I wanted to work with them. I thought that was the only way forward when I was in government, and I still do.

There is not time today to go into detailed funding proposals, but I think we have to accept that in the long term the funding of social care will need to be not only more generous than it has been in recent years, but fair, and seen to be fair, to every generation. I make the point, which is not often made in this context, that intergenerational fairness means being fair to older people as well as younger people. The view has taken hold in some circles that being over 60 means being over-privileged. I strongly challenge that view. The current generation of 50 and 60-somethings is the first in which people are often simultaneously trying to help their children with housing and their parents with care needs. This is not special pleading for a particular cohort. It is important to remember the obvious but salient point that young people themselves will grow old. Setting one generation against another is not only a bad basis for policy making but very short-sighted for the individuals most affected. Instead, we need to find a solution that will provide stability for decades to come.

I suspect that Members on both sides of the House would be united by the proposition that, however much better we get at using technology and housing design to keep people in their own homes for longer, the sheer growth in the number of people needing some kind of care will mean that we need to find more money. Precisely because that will be a problem for decades, not just for the rest of this Parliament, it is vital that the solution has cross-party support. Social care is a challenge for all parties.

The fundamental issue of whether social care should be a national or local service is often ignored. I am struck that 44% of Kent County Council’s budget goes on adult social care. That number will only rise. I am also struck that, in contrast with almost every other area of policy that involves local government, when I talk to local councillors about this issue they say, “Maybe

this should be dealt with at a national rather than a local level.” They almost do not want it to be their responsibility any more. That is practically unique. I hope that Ministers will address that.

I urge Ministers to include staffing needs, the importance of which has been mentioned by Members on both sides of the House, in the Green Paper. Given what the wider situation will be post Brexit, we need to find ways of using technology, being much better at training care workers from the British population, and raising the status of care work. Labour Members mentioned that, and I agree. Looking at care purely as a business sector, it seems to me a classic case of somewhere that both technology and the human touch are vital. That combination is vital to providing high-quality care. To put it starkly, a robot may be able to do the lifting part of the work, but it cannot provide the equally necessary words of encouragement and comfort. I think social care will be an employment growth sector in the decades ahead.

Getting social care right is clearly one of this Government’s biggest challenges, as it will be for every Government for many decades to come. Over the next couple of years, we will have the chance to reset the debate so that it becomes calmer and more realistic. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Minister for Care want to provide that calm and realism, and I hope that those of us contributing to this debate from the outside will live up to that, too. I very much look forward to the publication of the Green Paper.

5.3 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): There are few career commitments more commendable than dedicating time to the care of others, especially our elderly and vulnerable relatives. I am disappointed that the Care Minister is no longer in her place. I was shocked by some of her comments. She accused my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) of not mentioning or thanking social care workers. I listened very carefully to my hon. Friend’s speech, and it was imbued throughout with a passionate defence of the people who work in the care sector—their terms, their conditions, their pay and their commitment. I would like the message to go back to the Minister that I thought what she said was very unfair. All of us on both sides of the House know that people in our social care workforce deserve a huge amount of respect and gratitude for the hard work and long hours they put in to deliver the best care to our elderly parents and grandparents.

There is no doubt that social care has been in crisis for a number of years. Time and again, commitments have been reneged on and the issue has been kicked into the long grass. Government cuts have put pressure on the ability of local councils to deliver key services. Redcar and Cleveland has lost £90 million since 2010 and has had to cut £5 million from social care over the past three years. There is no way that that will not have an impact.

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): Warrington Borough Council faces funding pressures of more than £3.3 million to meet its adult social care needs in 2018-19.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it is up to the Government to support councils in their efforts to provide quality social care to their communities, not to pass the buck—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

Faisal Rashid: On to council taxpayers in my constituency or any other?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I need to correct that. When I say “order”, it means you should stop. I am not trying to cause any problems. We must have short interventions. If not, I will have to put a time limit on speeches. Intervene, by all means, but interventions must be short.

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid) is spot on. It was telling that the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) made the point that local councils have reached the point where they do not want to deliver social care any more. We know perfectly well what the reason is. If they had the funding, I am sure they would be delighted to deliver social care, but we know what impact the cuts have had.

Ministers have focused on squeezing more out of local taxpayers, which provides only a drop in the ocean compared with the extra funding that is needed to close the gap.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend will be aware that increases in the precept have regional variations, so 2% in Redcar is very different from 2% in Stoke-on-Trent. That then causes greater regional imbalances.

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a regressive form of taxation. Every time the precept or local council tax is raised, people pay twice: they see less of a service, but they are still paying through their income tax and through council tax.

I want to talk about the people who are the backbone of our care system: those who work in the care sector. In my local authority area, just over 170 social care staff are employed to support about 5,750 people. That is an average of 33 to 34 cases per member of staff, with all the challenges and safeguarding issues that come with that. The more experienced staff often deal with many more cases than that. As people live longer, with multiple and increasingly complex health conditions, the time and effort required from staff becomes greater. Currently, about 22% of residents in Redcar and Cleveland are over the age of 65. That is expected to increase to 27% by 2030. There are also many working-age disabled or vulnerable adults who have long-term care needs.

The needs of the individuals who need care vary hugely, from those who are frail and need physical support to those with learning disabilities or mental health problems. Mental health poses a particularly difficult challenge, with one in 14 people over the age of 65 developing symptoms of dementia in their lifetime. The care demands required of staff to support these people are ever more complex.

Mike Hill: I praise Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council for being the first council in the north-east to adopt Unison’s ethical care charter, which promotes

staff training and pay and quality care. It has also been adopted in Hartlepool. Will my hon. Friend join me in supporting the further ambition to establish local care academies to guarantee that such training and care packages are written into employment contracts?

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Much has been said today about the prestige of the sector and that suggestion would go a long way to addressing that.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): To follow up on the issue of training, it is important that people who are going into people's homes to care for them or who care for people in a home setting have all the training they require to perform the duties that are expected of them. Too often, they are not given the training they need and are expected to do far more than they are qualified to do.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I believe there is a voluntary time limit of seven minutes. We are in danger of spoiling that. If we do, I will have to bring in a time limit of about 5 minutes. I do not want to do that, so I need Members to help me ensure that everybody gets an equal amount of time.

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) is absolutely right and I welcome all the interventions, but I should probably now crack on with my speech. She is spot on in saying that there is a critical need for training in the workforce and that not enough has been invested in them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) mentioned Unison, which has done fantastic work in the sector. Its biennial survey with *Community Care* magazine last year revealed a worrying picture of care workers having a lack of time to spend with residents. Nearly half the respondents to the survey said that the volume of cases they were responsible for left them feeling "over the limit" and more than half blamed staff shortages for their heavy workload.

As well as providing direct care, practitioners often have a responsibility to support the army of family carers who themselves are working to look after relatives at home. The shadow care system, as it is known, is running alongside the care system, keeping the whole thing going through the love and good will of unpaid family support and kinship carers, as has been discussed. For example, the Junction Foundation in my constituency, which I am proud to support as my charity of the year, does a lot of work with young carers who bear the pressures of looking after relatives while their peers are enjoying growing up. In Redcar and Cleveland, we have a fantastic organisation called Carers Together, which provides support and tailored services to people in care roles. It is aware of around 7,000 carers in the borough, but the 2011 census suggests that the number could be much higher.

I want to say a bit more about the workforce. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South said, they are underpaid, undervalued and overworked. The National Audit Office report from February was damning in its assessment that the Department of Health and Social Care

"is not doing enough to support a sustainable social care workforce."

Data from the Skills for Care charity suggests that there is currently a turnover rate of 32% for the role of care worker in adult residential care in England, but that rises to a shocking 44.3% for care workers in adult domiciliary care. It is completely understandable that people working in this tough environment decide to leave the care profession when the pressure becomes too great. If people are to see social care as a viable career, they need to feel valued, and too often that is not the case.

With demand for social care increasing as our population ages, the workload will only get larger for the staff who remain. As the National Audit Office report also suggests, the Government are simply not providing the leadership that is needed. Local councils and care partnerships that are commissioning care are not being given the confidence of a national strategy designed to support the workforce and recruit new carers. A national strategy, for example, could see health and social care brought more closely together. The silo mentality between the NHS and social care has meant that the two services have passed patients to and fro, duplicating resources and missing the opportunities to work together to deliver better outcomes.

It is welcome that the Government have endorsed more partnership working, and these relationships are already getting results. In Redcar and Cleveland, our current partnership, which is led by the health and wellbeing board, has been given a rating of excellent by the National Audit Office. Our better care fund shared budget with the local clinical commissioning group is already leading to some positive outcomes, with a reduction in the number of non-elective admissions to hospital. This joined-up working is also leading to the establishment of an intermediate care centre in Eston in my constituency, which will help elderly patients to avoid long hospital stays and receive recovery support closer to home. It is a great initiative, with the local council and the NHS working more closely together. These initiatives show the huge possibilities from integrating health and social care, but on their own, they barely scratch the surface in dealing with the crisis facing services.

Social care is in desperate need of an urgent cash boost to address the funding gap, to ensure that social care services are properly staffed, and to ensure that the workforce get the pay and development support that they deserve for the work they do. The social care levy and grants in the autumn 2017 Budget have staved off collapse, but the disastrous bankruptcy of Northamptonshire County Council shows what happens when the pressure from cuts becomes too great to manage.

In the longer term, the system needs reform and these decisions cannot be kicked into the long grass any more. It is time for a care system fit for the 21st century, which puts social care on an equal footing with the NHS, and does not leave elderly people and their families worrying about needing to sell their home to pay the care bill.

5.12 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) and to take part in this very important debate. For me, this is the biggest service delivery challenge that we face as a nation. The UK has an ageing population and a finite amount of money, regardless of what Members

on some Benches in this place say. We have to focus on delivering outcomes for people. Sometimes that gets lost when we are chasing our tail and focusing on dealing with conditions, rather than with prevention. We face a challenging environment in terms of service delivery. That is why I would support a royal commission on social care, and I agree with and echo the sentiments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) on that.

In Cornwall, the challenges are compounded, and let me explain why. The last census showed that 22% of people in Cornwall were over 65, and this will increase as more and more young people leave the county to seek work or a career. I believe that the next census will show that the problem has been compounded even further. As for the rural sparsity of Cornwall, we have 550,000 people in this county of ours across almost 150 miles of coastline. Traditionally, we have had a low-wage economy and a much less competitive marketplace, particularly in care. This highlights the rural productivity lag and the economic challenges facing the day-to-day delivery of care in our area. It is the perfect storm.

A typical day for a carer in Cornwall might involve long journey times to make care visits, difficulties parking and meeting care time targets and delivering complex care in pressured timeframes, and when people step in to cover sickness or pick up a complicated care package because someone is away, it can be particularly difficult. It is easy to see why people might choose to work in a supermarket or another career, rather than work in the care sector, but there might be light at the end of the tunnel. Recent changes implemented by the Royal Cornwall Hospital, which now agrees care packages when people arrive at hospital, have improved the system, increased bed capacity and helped people return to their own beds—in my view, a person's own bed is the best bed for them. The £12 million the Government recently provided to Cornwall Council, for which I thank them, has also helped.

Technology, which has been alluded to, has a huge part to play in delivering care in rural communities. There are big opportunities here. The roll-out of 4G, 5G and broadband will make rural communities much better connected, while the GovTech initiative, which the Government recently announced, is looking at health provision. We have a chance to utilise technology to take a much more community-focused approach to care. The Post Office has a part to play as well. I recently attended a dinner hosted by the Post Office, and what it does in terms of care in the community should be welcomed.

I am vice-chairman of the Parliamentary Internet, Communications and Technology Forum, and I had a very interesting discussion with somebody recently about a social care app they were developing to provide a care service that works in much the same way as Uber, by linking purchasers and care providers, and which could cut out some of the top slicing by private providers and local authorities and put that money directly into the pockets of carers, who, instead of surviving on the national living wage, could see a significant uplift in income.

It is vital that we retain good people in the profession and boost morale. If we can create a better and more effective system in our rural areas, that is what we

should do. So I say to the Government: be bold, go for the technology and see what we can do. The provision of social care needs to be much more socially inclusive and decentralised. We need to empower individuals—both carers and their loved ones—and create a balance that puts rural communities on a level playing field with urban communities. This matters to people in North Cornwall and so it matters to me. I want to make sure we get it right.

5.18 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): It is a pleasure to speak once again in a debate on this important subject. I applaud my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson, who has made this speech before and been resolute in standing up for the care industry, and I support the Labour motion, which is very good. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who spoke for the Scottish National party, also made some very important points.

I support what the royal commission on long-term care for the elderly said 19 years ago: long-term care should be free at the point of need and paid for out of general taxation. I want to go beyond what Labour is saying at the moment, however, which I applaud and support, and look to a world with free long-term care and a care service run on exactly the same basis as the national health service. We were moving in that direction just before we lost office in 2010. The then Secretary of State for Health suggested a national care service like the national health service. I intervened on him and said, “Yes, and paid for out of general taxation and free at the point of need,” but we did not get it. We did not get the support all those years ago, despite the support of many Members for the royal commission report, strong support in the country and a trade union-led campaign calling for free long-term care. It was all to no avail and so the issue has rumbled on ever since. The issue did not go away, however, and I raised it myself in the Chamber several times over those years.

Eventually, the Dilnot commission was set up, and in its 2012 report it recommended a compromise. Sir Andrew Dilnot, whom I know well, is a superb man, and he did a brilliant job. He came up with a compromise that he thought might be worn by the Treasury, proposing that self-funding should be capped at £35,000 for a lifetime. The Government dragged their feet and resisted, but eventually, after wriggling a lot, they agreed to a lifetime cap of £72,000—twice the amount that Sir Andrew had suggested. Even then, however, that was deferred until 2020, and now it seems to have been deferred indefinitely. We are well away from where we should be. Scotland, of course, has had free care, and I applaud Scotland for that. I do not know why we should not follow suit.

If self-funding affected only the wealthy, it would not be such a worry, but it actually affects millions of working-class families. The first generation who became owner-occupiers have been particularly badly hit. Successive Governments have wrung their hands about the difficulties experienced by young people in achieving owner-occupation, while at the same time cutting off one of the only possible routes to owner-occupation for many: the cascading of family equity down the generations, whereby the capital in Granny's home passes down to grandchildren when she ends her days.

I hold resolutely to the view that long-term care should be free to all, and funded from progressive taxation at the point of need. I am not too concerned about how that taxation is raised—it could be national insurance, income tax or a hypothecated tax—but the money should come from general taxation.

Scott Mann: The hon. Gentleman is making a valid point about the funding of care, but I should be interested to know whether he considers the use of technology, which I mentioned and which was mentioned by a couple of my colleagues, is an option that might enable us to do things slightly better.

Kelvin Hopkins: I am always in favour of improving the way we do things, and technology is of course important.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, given that some funding decisions and challenges are very difficult, and given the amount of money that is needed, we should adopt a cross-party approach, looking at all the options, building consensus, explaining the position to the public and ensuring that this arrangement is delivered?

Kelvin Hopkins: In fact, the royal commission did cover funding. Over the last 20 years and more, I have spoken to many audiences, and have asked them, “What would you prefer—to have your house taken away from you, or Granny’s house taken away, or to pay slightly more tax?” The unanimous view was in favour of a slightly increased level of taxation to pay for long-term care. Everyone is going to get old. I am easily the oldest person in the Chamber. I am not planning to go into long-term care any time soon, but on the other hand I am closer to it than the other Members who are present. However, I will not speak about myself.

There is another factor in all this. In my constituency, there were three local authority care homes where the residents were happy, the staff were wonderful, and the healthcare professionals treasured them. All those homes were closed, and the land was sold off. Now we see the private care sector in constant difficulty. Given the collapse of Southern Cross and the ongoing threats to the future of many more homes, I believe that at some point the state will have to step in to ensure that care continues to be provided. Indeed, the Minister conceded that point: she said that we would have to step in and solve the problem. Why not set up a national care service now, and start to bring care homes back into the public sector as we did in 1948? I am not old enough to remember Nye Bevan’s speech in the House in which he proposed the establishment of the national health service, but I was inspired by him when I was at school, and my policies developed as a result.

Another scandal has been reported recently, namely the practice of effectively using self-funders to subsidise publicly funded residential care. Contracts with cash-strapped councils are squeezed, and charges for self-funders are increased to compensate. In one case, the charge for a care home resident who had been state-funded and then became self-funding was multiplied by several times. Most worryingly, there have been reports of inadequate care in homes across the country, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. When care is provided by homes in the private sector that are squeezed for funding and

have to make profits, it is inevitable that care standards will eventually be cut. It is clear that long-term care should not be in the profit-driven private sector, but should be a true public service, in the public sector. I commend today’s motion and all that has been said by many hon. Members on both sides of the House, but we have to move towards a national care service, based on exactly the same principles as the national health service.

5.24 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I would like to praise our social care workforce and those who provide care voluntarily. The Government are not in denial about the issues that we face. That is why the Green Paper is being worked on and will be with us within months.

In spite of the huge challenges in this area, the Select Committee on Health and Social Care learned only yesterday that there were 1,700 fewer delayed transfers of care this February compared with the previous February. That is a small bit of progress in the right direction. In evidence to our sustainability and transformation inquiry, the Committee learned about some of the other good things happening around the country, including the passport scheme for care home staff in Wakefield, which allows them to transfer easily around the sector with their qualifications and experience properly registered and recorded. That will lead to an extra 750 jobs in that area by 2025.

In addition, we learned that in the 12 months to quarter 2 in 2017-18, compared with the 12 months to quarter 2 in 2015-16, emergency admissions in enhanced healthcare homes fell by 1.4%, compared with care homes in the rest of England that were not in that scheme, where they rose by 6.7%. We learned that in Buckinghamshire, through joint working between the NHS and local councils responsible for social care, there was a 57% reduction in falls leading to harm. The last example is from Tameside and Glossop, where, we were told, nurse-led telemedicine to care homes reduced hospital admissions from 122 to 75 and resulted in 75 earlier discharges. Those are examples of good practice around the country, but as ever with health and social care the question is how we can mainstream them all over the country.

In my remaining few minutes, I want to discuss what we do about the situation. Germany has introduced a proper nationalised social care insurance scheme, whereby people pay contributions, with adjustments made every few years. It has been in place since 1995 and has settled down. It is not contentious, but has broad agreement, and Japan has a similar scheme. They have been doing it for 23 years, and for me that points to the direction that we need go in.

Kelvin Hopkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Selous: Very briefly.

Kelvin Hopkins: It seems to me that the hon. Gentleman, my constituency neighbour, is agreeing with what I was saying. We can debate how it is paid for, but we want a national care service, paid for by everybody.

Andrew Selous: I think Germany absolutely has something to teach us, and it has a private insurance scheme on top of that as well.

We need to see weekend discharges in hospitals, on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, with local authorities and social care being available over the weekend, so that we do not get a bulge on Monday morning, causing our hospitals huge problems. We need proper pay for care home staff. They have a choice, but there is no choice for us as a country about whether we look after our frail elderly people and those who need social care. We have to do it, but people do not have to choose social care as a profession. Therefore, we need some proper labour market analysis and parity between similar jobs in the NHS and social care. The lowest-paid workers in the NHS have just had a 29% pay rise. If we are to have true parity, we need to treat the social care workforce as well as we treat the NHS workforce. Independent living schemes, which my own local authority of Central Bedfordshire is pioneering, are showing the way, and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee was impressed when it went to see Priory View in Dunstable. I gather that in East Sussex there is data to show that this type of extra care scheme—

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Does my hon. Friend think that there is also a role for the greater use of co-operatives such as the CareShare organisation, which matches those in need of care with care givers so that they can swap time with each other?

Andrew Selous: That is an excellent scheme. Returning to East Sussex, I understand that data suggests that its extra care scheme is now saving about £1,000 per resident. We have seen examples from overseas—Germany and Japan in particular—and we have a Government who are committed to finding a solution. I eagerly look forward to seeing those solutions in the Green Paper and to our implementing them quickly.

5.30 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who is very knowledgeable on these issues.

In October last year, we sat in the Chamber and conducted an Opposition day debate on this crucial issue of social care. Today, six months later, we are doing exactly the same thing, not because there has been any major policy change or even any significant ideas from the Government, but because, six months on from the Government being told that there was a social care crisis, they have taken no concrete action to solve it. In fact, rather than tackle it head on, all they have done is shift the responsibility further on to hard-pressed councils and devolved the funding burden and pain on to individual taxpayers in my constituency and throughout England.

Social care faces a deficit of £2.5 billion by the end of the decade. That is not a Labour party figure, and it is not fake news; it is from the reputable King's Fund. Cuts of £6.3 billion have been made to adult social care since 2010. As a result, there has been a 26% fall in the number of people accessing care, meaning that 400,000 fewer people are able to get the support they need and deserve.

My constituency of Weaver Vale is served by two councils: Halton, and Cheshire West and Chester. Both have fought a valiant battle against Tory austerity, doing all

they can to protect the most vulnerable, but things are now at crisis point. Figures show that since 2011-12, external funding for Cheshire West and Chester Council and Houlton Council has been cut by 38.1% and 43.7% respectively. That situation is unsustainable. The care sector says so, the charities that support our vulnerable people say so, and even the Tory-led Local Government Association says so, yet still the Government do not listen. If they do not listen to the experts, or even to their own Tory councillors, perhaps they will listen to those at the sharp end on the frontline of social care: our staff.

On Saturday, I spoke to Paula, who represents thousands of local government workers in Unison in my constituency. She had a message for the Secretary of State:

"Do the right thing. Invest in our valuable public services. Invest in our amazing workers".

This touches on some of the points made by Conservative Members. I agree with some of my hon. Friends who have said decent, quality social care costs money and that we need to put our money where our mouth is. We need to have an honest conversation about this. Let us finally take the bull by the horns and establish a national health and social care service. The Government must listen to public sector workers like Paula, and the millions of people like her, as well as to unions such as Unison. Only then will our communities and our councils have the funding that meets their needs, and which is stable and fair. Only then will we begin to tackle the crisis in social care.

5.34 pm

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury). I start by declaring an interest as my husband is the non-executive director of a social enterprise in the area of social care. I join my colleagues and others across the House in welcoming this debate, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about this hugely important issue.

I am a great believer in localism. I was a borough councillor for several years before entering this place. As a member of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, I have worked with colleagues to examine the issue and to question Ministers on the provision of social care across the country, and I am pleased that the Committee published a report on adult social care last year.

The health and social care devolution settlement to my region of Greater Manchester provides us with an opportunity to tackle health issues from the ground up, and I commend the Government for the considered approach that they have taken since the proposal's inception several years ago. Greater Manchester is home to almost 3 million people across 10 local authorities. However, according to the Office for National Statistics, life expectancy in Greater Manchester is among the lowest in the country, so the challenges that we face are significant. If things continue as they are, we will be facing an unsustainable £2 billion shortfall in health funding by 2021.

Greater Manchester faces a number of issues, one of which is dementia. Members will know from the experiences of the constituents they meet in their surgeries, or perhaps through their own personal experience, that dementia causes immense suffering to individuals and their families. Dementia is now a leading cause of death in the UK,

and it is estimated that there could be nearly 35,000 people living with dementia in Greater Manchester by 2021, a third of whom will have symptoms so severe that they will require 24-hour care. Dementia care is estimated to cost around £375 million a year in Greater Manchester alone.

Similarly, strokes are the fourth biggest killer in the UK and a leading cause of disability. More than 100,000 strokes happen in the UK each year, with someone suffering from one every five minutes. In Greater Manchester, there are 6,000 a year. However, swift, specialist treatment can make a huge difference. My constituency has the No. 1 rated stroke unit in the country. Stepping Hill hospital's stroke centre has high-tech scanners to detect blood clots in the brain and uses emergency clot-busting drugs to break them down. It also provides stroke patients with a full rehabilitation programme and a high-tech sensory garden in which they can recover.

Hospitals are an important part of our healthcare provision. However, if we were to start again, given the sort of patient environment we have today, perhaps we would not design a system like that developed in 1948, which focused on acute hospitals. We would create a system much more focused on health and tackling long-term conditions such as dementia, heart disease and diabetes, all of which account for 70% of the NHS's total spend. As a result, much more needs to be done in the community. A key aim of combining the health and social care budgets is to reflect that trend. Care needs to be moved out of hospitals into the community.

To provide effective support, integrated services are vital. A key Government aim from the outset has been to enable care to move out of hospitals and into the community, closer to where patients want to be—in their own home. An example of that strategy in practice is the “Stockport Together” programme, through which five health and care organisations have come together to integrate health and social care services across the borough. Stockport is proud of the fact that we are one of the healthiest places to live in the north-west, but the rising number of older people in Stockport means that there will be a greater need for health and social care support both in the short and long terms. Currently, one person five in Stockport is over 65.

NHS and social care organisations in Stockport, led by the local clinical commissioning group, have come together to tackle fragmented care by joining up services for older people in supported living schemes and care homes. I appreciate that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing social care—what works for Stockport might not work for areas such as Salford, Sale or Stretford—so this is not about reducing the amount of money spent on care, as Members sometimes assert; it is about investing it in a smart way to ensure that we can meet the increased care needs that we face. The “Stockport Together” programme has demonstrated that, by joining up the arms of local government and health providers, we can reduce the number of ambulance call outs to falls and reduce the number of people in hospital who could be treated at home.

The Greater Manchester combined authority has £6 billion of devolved funding at its disposal, and I hope part of that will be channelled into primary care to facilitate early assessments and to support patients newly diagnosed with dementia. Doing so would have a

positive knock-on effect. By focusing on community care we can reduce emergency admissions and care home placements, and relieve the pressure on our local hospitals.

The integration of health and social care in Greater Manchester is a significant milestone in tackling the challenges I have outlined, and I look forward to the publication of the Government's Green Paper on this hugely important subject.

5.40 pm

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): I will make three brief points. The cuts we have seen to social care because of the huge reductions in local council funding are not just morally questionable but economically illiterate. Hundreds of thousands fewer people are now getting publicly funded social care, which is there to help frail, vulnerable people just to get out of bed and dressed, fed and washed—things we all take for granted. Those who still get publicly funded support are seeing it reduced, with shorter visits than they desperately need. The result is increasing numbers of elderly people going into hospital and getting stuck when they do not need to be there, which is terrible for them and costs the taxpayer far more.

As the shadow Care Minister said, this has a huge impact on unpaid family carers. One in four unpaid carers has not had a single day off caring for five years. Not a single day in five years! Think of the strain that puts on their physical and mental health. One in three unpaid family carers in work has had to give up their job or reduce their hours, so their income goes down, they end up claiming more in benefits and their employer loses their skills. There would be an outcry if that happened in any other area of the workforce.

I am afraid that the Government still do not get it. They are still failing to look properly at the NHS and social care together. It is astonishing that we have a separate Green Paper on social care, and doubly astonishing that the Green Paper focuses only on older people and not the hundreds of thousands of disabled people. We have to look at them together, and I urge the Minister to think again about the Government's approach.

That leads me to my third point, which is about the solution. We need an urgent and immediate injection of cash into social care and the NHS. We simply cannot put the services, patients, carers and families through this all again next winter. We also need a bold 10-year strategy for investment and reform.

The NHS and social care will always be political issues, and rightly so—they are things we deeply care about—but we need a cross-party approach on future funding, especially of social care, not just because any party that comes up with a bold proposal risks being obliterated by its political opponents, but because we desperately need a system that will last for the long term, not for the politicians but for the people who use and work in those services.

I urge the Government to heed the calls from more than 100 MPs on both sides of the House for a short parliamentary commission on a long-term strategy, which would report within a year. I also hope the Government will consider the 10 principles of long-term funding for the NHS and social care put forward by myself, the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb)

and the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles). We agree that the NHS must remain a universal tax-funded service, available free at the point of delivery, based on need, not ability to pay. We agree that spending on the NHS and social care must increase by substantially more than inflation over the next 20 years because of our ageing population, new treatments and technologies, and the need to achieve genuine equality of access to treatment for people with mental ill health. We believe that people are more likely to be willing to pay more for the NHS and social care if they can be certain that additional resources are dedicated to that end and cannot be diverted into other Government programmes—in other words, there should be hypothecation. We believe that increases in funding must be progressive and fair between the generations, with higher earners, the self-employed and better-off pensioners making a fair contribution to future funding. We also believe that every five years there should be an independent assessment, carried out by the Office for Budget Responsibility or a separate health-focused body, to look at the resources needed to run the NHS and social care in future, which Parliament will then debate and decide on.

These are tough issues, no one is denying it, but we have to join up the services, and we need in this year, the 70th anniversary of the NHS, to get a future funding settlement. If we were creating the NHS today, it would be a national health and care service. It must be fair, it must be progressive and it must last for future generations. I urge the Government to act.

5.46 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), who made a typically passionate speech, and I echo what she said about the need for a cross-party approach. When she mentioned that anyone talking about social care almost has to do it out of election time because otherwise they can end up being torpedoed by their opponents, I was reminded of one particularly vile leaflet issued in the Cheltenham constituency during the 2017 election, which stated, “First dementia will take your mind. Then the Prime Minister will take your house.” That sort of politics is pretty low and does a disservice. So I firmly believe that we need cross-party working on these very long-term issues.

Building a social care system for the mid-21st century—it is incredible to be talking about the upcoming mid-21st century; this feels very old in that respect—is one of the most important tasks facing this Government and any subsequent Government. Many Members have mentioned the fact that our population is ageing, and indeed it is. The number of people aged 75 and over is expected to increase by 70% between 2015 and 2035, and the figure for older people as a share of the population is expected to rise from 28% in 1971 to more than 36% in 2037, when I reach retirement age. Not only are people living longer, but there will be fewer working-age citizens to support them through the taxation system. That is particularly acute in my constituency. In the Silhill ward, from which the constituency takes its name, 40% of people are over 65, and I regularly come into contact with people who are dealing silently with huge care

issues. Solihull rests and survives on a sea of volunteers and those who are willing to give of their time in order to help people in this vulnerable situation.

I welcome the Government's decision to invest an extra £2 billion in our social care sector over the next few years. That is a first step, but this is not a problem that can be fixed just by spending money. We need not only to explore why some councils are perfectly able to provide quality care on their current budget whereas others are not, but to futureproof our social care system against demographic trends that will place huge strains on it.

I wish to focus on the two structural reforms that Ministers should consider as they draw up their Green Paper, the first of which is providing more support for the co-operative movement in this sector. There has not been a great deal of debate on that, although I mentioned it to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). I am thinking of examples such as CareShare, which helps to match those in need of care with care givers and which fosters that peer-group support—it is a social care platform owned by its members. There are working international examples of that in areas that do not have an NHS, such as Spain, Italy and Latin America, which also have strong family networks and strong family connections. The social care co-operatives have proved very popular and could augment rather than replace state and other systems. It is about a network, effectively, moving us forward, because the state alone cannot solve or resolve this.

On the subject of creating variety in the sector, I would also like to see support for the growth of mass market social care insurance. That could be provided by both the state and, to a degree, private suppliers. The state approach should follow a National Employment Savings Trust model for funding and for distributing that funding to the carers. That is a solid example that we can follow, and we need to look closely at the examples we have seen in Germany and Japan. That can help people to prepare for their old age while they are still able to set appropriate funds aside and make meaningful decisions about their future care.

Ministers are rightly trying to ensure that individual service users are at the heart of the reforms as we go forward. Making patients equal partners in the care process and instituting principles such as “No decision about me without me” are all about empowering people and delivering higher quality, greater transparency and more accountability as a result. Supporting a wider variety of providers and care methods is the next step in that process. That is the lesson of the free schools movement, where the Government recognised that supporting a wide range of schools was essential in giving parents and pupils meaningful choices about their education. Ministers must ensure not only that the new social care system properly supports the work of excellent third sector providers such as Mencap, but that it uses tax breaks and other incentives to help to foster alternatives such as the patient-led co-operatives I talked about earlier.

We also need to restore the market for long-term care insurance products to fund social care. That used to exist to some degree, but it was never able to achieve substantial economies of scale. Since the disintegration of independent financial advice, it has basically also disintegrated. That must change, for two reasons.

First, people need a realistic idea of how much they will need to set aside to fund the level and style of social care that they want, and a properly functioning market with a wide variety of products is by far the most successful way of achieving that. Without it, that essential planning will be the preserve of the well-informed few.

At present, too many people put off thinking about social care until they have no other choice. I had this happen in my own family. At a moment of crisis, they are suddenly in need of extra support, but leaving all the decisions to this late stage hugely reduces a patient's scope to make decisions about their care and choose a model that works for them. I believe, having echoed the point made by the hon. Member for Leicester West about the need to work across parties and not torpedoing ideas, that we need an honest conversation in this country about when we need care, and to plan it, rather than reaching those crisis points.

5.52 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I want to touch on some of the social care workforce issues. Social care is what we rely on when we need help—whether that is residential care when we need to go into a home, or care in our own home. We rely on social careworkers, residential careworkers, and home careworkers and support workers if we need help at home. These are staff who deal with our most personal needs at a time when we might be at our most vulnerable, yet we fail to value adequately the work that they do and the care and sensitivity with which, on the whole, they deliver it. I know how vital that support is and how well and compassionately it can be delivered when it is at its best, as we briefly had that support for both of my parents recently.

These are staff who are often under pressure to meet impossible visit schedules, who are on the frontline of looking after our families and neighbours, and who are on the lowest pay grades, too. They are predominantly female. As has been mentioned, Unison, the trade union that represents many of these staff, conducted a survey of the staff in social care with *Community Care* magazine. It showed a picture of staff feeling stressed, working more hours than they are paid for each day, and staff shortages that put pressure on others. It gets more basic than that: many staff are not even being paid the national minimum wage let alone the national living wage; domiciliary care staff are not being paid for the time that it takes to travel between visits; and staff on zero-hour contracts—Unison estimates that there are about 300,000 of them—are facing uncertain and often disrupted hours.

Unison has been pushing an ethical care charter for home careworkers and a residential care charter, too—here I should mention the “sleep-in” staff who are not being paid the national minimum wage. I am sorry that the Minister is not in her place at present, because when she touched on this matter she appeared to suggest that the Government are looking at legal ways not to pay sleep-in payments at the national minimum wage rate. Perhaps she, or one of the other Ministers, could correct me if I misheard that point. These staff deserve, and are entitled, to be paid for the work that they do.

It is no wonder that staff turnover is huge in the sector, varying from 31.8% in the residential sector to 44.3% in domiciliary care. These are not just trade union figures. Yesterday, the Health and Social Care

Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, which are working together on adult social care, heard from the chief executive of Care England, the providers' body, who also highlighted the huge problem of turnover in staff. This is not good for employers and it is certainly not good for the people for whom these careworkers work.

This is no way to provide care for the most vulnerable people in our communities—they deserve the most compassionate care that meets their needs—or to treat the staff who provide that care. This is not just about the staff. They are under such pressure because, year after year, this Government have cut funding to local councils, which provide the care, at the same time as those councils face a huge rise in demand. We know that the care market itself is fragile and failing.

Our social care system is not working as it should do. If we are to make it work, we must ensure that funding is provided now and that the care staff are treated properly. We must give social care equity with NHS services. Our older people, and those who care for them, deserve nothing less.

5.57 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a great pleasure indeed to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), and all the other contributions that have been made. In the brief time that I have, I wish to start by speaking about my own experience and why I am so passionate about this subject. I am one of the one in six people to whom the Minister referred when she talked about carers. I am a carer for my elderly mother who has dementia, so many of these problems touch me and my family quite personally. I totally recognise the situation that we face up and down the country. My own mother is receiving excellent care in Cumbria. I am delighted to pay tribute to the carers in Cumbria who are doing a fantastic job looking after her in a very challenging situation.

Closer to home, in Redditch, I recognise the importance of getting care right in my constituency. I have taken a close personal interest in the care that is available in my own home town. I have seen some amazing examples of care—whether it is at the Dorothy Terry House, Stonebridge or Brambles. In all those places, I have seen staff go above and beyond to care for elderly people at a very difficult and challenging time in their lives. That is really important and it is something that the Government are getting behind.

We have heard much criticism of the Government from Opposition Members. It is very difficult to take that on board when we all know how difficult the situation was when we came into office. To put the matter into perspective, I had a meeting with Worcestershire County Council just this week, and I discovered that the care of some people in Worcestershire costs £38,000 a year. I am sure that every Member will recognise that that is a lot of money. We all want to provide the best care for our constituents. That is what we all came into politics for. I resent the accusation that we do not care and that we do not want to get that right. We passionately want to get it right. We know that our constituents deserve that; people in Redditch deserve it and demand it. It touches all our hearts when we see people being failed by the system.

At the same time, we need to have a realistic debate about where the £38,000 comes from. We sometimes hear from the Opposition that, in the words of the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury), it is wrong to ask hard-pressed local council tax payers to pay. Well, if money is to be found, the only place that it is going to come from is tax payers—the tax payers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and up and down the country—and we are all mindful of that. The economic argument therefore has to be at the heart of what we are doing.

The Minister for Care has just returned to her place. I commend her for showing real leadership on this issue. Like the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), who has just left her place, I am a member of the all-party parliamentary group on carers, and I attended the meeting, as did the Minister. We all heard the stories from the carers, which were similar to the stories that we hear from our families and constituents. This Government and the Minister have shown considerable commitment, and real care and compassion towards getting this right. I also commend Carers UK, which is behind the excellent APPG, for its work; it really celebrates unsung heroes in our communities.

The Minister is going above and beyond to put into practice a system that can be long-term, sustainable and, most importantly, funded. She is aware that there has to be money going into the system. Money has to come from somewhere, and the only place it can come from is taxes. It is therefore important that we get behind the leadership of the Health and Social Care Secretary, who has shown a dedication to bring together the health and social care sectors. That is the only way that we will solve the problem.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) said, there has to be cross-party consensus on this matter. We cannot descend to the pitiful levels seen in the general election when the Conservative party tried to have a grown-up conversation about one of the most difficult issues in our society—dementia. *[Interruption.]* Whatever Opposition Members are saying from a sedentary position, they know that the debate then really frightened and upset some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I am going to focus on the experience in my constituency.

The Government are putting a lot of money into public services, which help people every single day of their lives. I have seen evidence of that in my constituency, where £29 million is on its way to the Alexandra Hospital and the Worcestershire Royal Hospital, which serve my constituents in Redditch. Joining up hospital care will of course help with some of the issues around delayed transfers of care. It will also aid the elderly and frail unit to help people who are most in need of both health and social care.

I recommend that the Government take forward the consultation as soon as possible. Today's debate has been excellent.

6.4 pm

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): It is great to follow the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), although I do not believe in most of the things she said.

I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for once again giving Members the opportunity to raise the important issue of social care funding on the Floor of the House. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) for leading this important debate.

Time and again, we hear from care providers, service users and charities that the social care system is at tipping point, that it is in crisis, that urgent Government action is needed, and that without that help the entire system will collapse, yet the Government continue to bury their head in the sand on this issue. It is clear that the social care system is still in crisis and the Government are still failing to act. The right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) said that we should make this non-political. Well, the Conservative record on social care is utterly appalling. It is a record of savage cuts, U-turns and passing the buck that cannot be ignored. Since 2010, we have witnessed a fall in the quality of care, as well as cuts to the number of services that are offered and the number of people they are offered to. The Conservatives are spending less money on social care now than Labour was when we left office in 2010, despite demand having increased significantly. As it stands, only 2% of social care services are rated as “outstanding”, and according to the CQC, 41% of services that have been rated as “requiring improvement” in the past have failed to improve or have even deteriorated.

Even worse, though, is the Conservatives' record on action on these issues. There has been a policy vacuum from the Government since the U-turn on the disastrous dementia tax, and they have since missed the opportunities to address the crisis. They failed at the autumn Budget, and they failed again with the one-off £150 million local government financial settlement, which fell well short of what is needed to rescue the sector. They have abandoned plans for a cap on care costs and a plan to introduce an asset floor of £118,000. These are cold, hard facts that cannot be ignored any longer. The social care system is at tipping point. This is about ensuring that the most vulnerable adults in our society receive the care they need, when they need it.

Since 2010, councils have shouldered the largest burden of spending cuts. Years of underfunding mean that our councils can no longer put enough money into care to meet the needs of an ageing population. As a result, cuts to adult social care during that time have now reached over £6 billion, and now less than one in 12 director of adult social care is fully confident that their local authority will be able to meet its statutory duties in 2017-18. As I said in an intervention, Warrington Borough Council is facing funding pressures of over £3 million in meeting adult social care needs in 2018-19.

Social care infrastructure is at the heart of our society. Many of us here today will rely on the social care system for ourselves or for our loved ones at some point in our lives. Indeed, some of us here today, and many of the constituents we represent, will already have experience with this broken system, and it will be clear to every single one of them that social care is in crisis. The situation is simply not sustainable. This is one of the most pressing issues of our time, and it cannot continue to be ignored. The Government must get to grips with this crisis now, before it is too late.

6.9 pm

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the detailed analysis of my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid). As a Yorkshire MP, it is always good to follow a Member from the other side of the Pennines—it is early season yet, Mr Deputy Speaker, but particularly when Yorkshire is at the top of the county championship and Lancashire is at the bottom.

I want to take up two points directly from the seven principles that the Secretary of State outlined when he talked about the Green Paper in March. One of them is about a valued workforce, which many hon. Members have spoken about, and the other is about a sustainable funding mechanism for the future.

Every morning in the villages and towns of Airedale and Wharfedale—some of which I am lucky to represent—very early, before the commuters have got up and even thought of going into the great cities of Bradford and Leeds, another workforce have just finished their night shift and are getting the first buses and trains into those cities, where they live. They have the characteristics of the social care workforce, who number about 1.4 million in our country. They are a massive workforce. About 80% are women and 80%—the overwhelming majority—are British, with 11% coming from outside the European economic area and about 5% from within it. There is a massive turnover in the social care workforce, as Unison has illustrated, with more than one in three care workers in care homes leaving their job in the course of the year. It is higher in domiciliary care.

Members on both sides of the House have talked about valuing these workers more. They are undervalued, underpaid and in many cases undertrained. The right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) and particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) talked about building a consensus, so that in the future we value more this extremely important workforce, who look after the most vulnerable people in our society at the time they need it most.

I have a couple of suggestions for the Government. It was good to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) that a Labour Government would abolish 15-minute care—the idea that social care workers have to provide for the most intimate needs in 15 minutes, tick a few boxes and then rush off to the next appointment. It makes me proud to be a Labour MP that we are committed to ending that sort of thing and to paying people properly.

There are things the Government could do, and some are little things. I notice that there is an advisory council on the Green Paper. The great and the good are on that advisory council, but it would be good to have a figure from the workforce on it. I remember the Prime Minister speaking on the steps of Downing Street about involving the workforce more. Unison is a union you can do business with, and it would be good to have an additional person from the unions on that council. The Library's list does not indicate that there is any such person on it at the moment.

If there ever was an industry crying out for a sectoral council, with the Government, the trade unions and the industry, to improve skills and the quality of the workforce, it surely is the care industry. Those are just a couple of ideas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West spoke passionately about the need to get consensus on a long-term funding model that all parties can agree on. I would stop talking about a “dementia tax”, and the bargain would be that the Conservatives would not talk about a “death tax”. We have used both those terms in the last 10 years, and I agree that they have not particularly enhanced our politics.

The letter from Members of all parties suggested raising and hypothecating national insurance. I would like to keep on the table the idea of an increase in inheritance tax, which the now Mayor of Manchester mentioned in the latter days of the Labour Government. Only 4% of people currently pay inheritance tax. It raises £5 billion. It is a potential way of achieving intergenerational fairness. A national insurance rise at the moment would hit many workers whose real incomes have been cut in recent years, so we should consider the option of raising inheritance tax. I think that many people in our society who are lucky enough to own their own home would accept that bargain—a guarantee that they could pass on the bulk of their estate to members of their family or to any good causes they wanted to support, in return for which I think they would be prepared to pay an additional inheritance tax.

The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) reminded us that one in four of us will end our days in a care home, but of course we do not know which of us that will be. We have to face up to the fact that, under the current system, those of us who are lucky enough to own our own home would lose most of it, if we were in a care home for a prolonged period. I see that as a life tax, rather than a death tax.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) *rose*—

John Grogan: I of course give way to my Yorkshire colleague.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Gentleman talks about one in four of us ending up in a care home, but we do not know which of us that will be. Does that lead him to conclude that we should pool the risk through social insurance, as they have done very successfully in Germany, having moved in 1995 from a local authority-funded scheme to a social insurance scheme, which also has great community benefits?

John Grogan: I certainly agree that we have to pool risk, but it has to involve everyone in society, from the poor to the rich, so that whatever our circumstances we get the care we need in those days.

We heard a lot from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) and other hon. Members about the potential of technology. That is a worthwhile point to make. Age UK has provided all hon. Members with the number of elderly people in our constituencies who need care. For example, in Keighley there are 3,500 long-term disabled people and 16,000 people with long-term illnesses. One way of helping them is through telemedicine from Airedale General Hospital. Even when the “beast from the east” was raging at its worst, people in Keighley, Airedale and the dales, even in remote areas, could still have tests and get treatment via broadband. That kept them out of hospital, even in the depths of winter.

This has been a great debate and I look forward to the Green Paper—may it come sooner, rather than later.

6.16 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a great pleasure, as a Manchester MP, to follow a Yorkshire Member from the other side of the Pennines, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (John Grogan). I am pleased to have an opportunity to contribute to the debate and want to make a few points that have not come up very much in the debate and that particularly affect my constituents in Trafford.

We have a relatively elderly population in Trafford, compared with Greater Manchester as a whole, which creates a higher level of need in the borough. We also suffer from a high level of delayed transfers of care—in February we had 737 days of delays in the system because of a lack of places in nursing homes, residential care homes or domiciliary care. We also have a disproportionate number of self-funders, which makes it more difficult for the local authority to shape the market. It also means that many self-funders have no connection with the social worker, so they do not necessarily get good advocacy to ensure that their care needs are met.

In Stretford and Urmston we have relatively few large chains supplying residential or domiciliary care; the market is characterised by small businesses, often long-established and family-owned. Those businesses struggle with a lack of reserves, and they are often in buildings that they have occupied for decades and that were not purpose built as care homes. They are now unable to raise the funds to enable them to upgrade their facilities to meet modern standards, not least because of the relative inadequacy of funding from the local authority. Only the other day another small local business decided that it will have to close its doors. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), that is a cause of great anxiety and stress for residents and their families.

Many hon. Members have talked about the pressures on the workforce. That is a particular problem in Trafford, where there are many job alternatives—people can work in the Trafford Centre or in MediaCity, or they can travel into Manchester to work in the many businesses in the city centre. I am sorry to say that I think that position will become worse as a result of Brexit, because we rely heavily on European Union nationals to serve our care sector.

One thing that I think the Government could helpfully do is talk of care jobs as skilled jobs. They might be low-paid jobs and they might have relatively low qualification entry requirements, but they are skilled jobs. If we have to replace workers from the European Union with more workers from our domestic workforce, we will need to make social care jobs seem attractive to them with good pay and conditions, training and career paths, and by talking up the quality and importance of those jobs.

I am sorry to say that the pressures on Trafford put us in a very bad position. According to Independent Age, we have the seventh worst CQC inspection record in the country. The CQC has found that 43% of residential care homes and 45% of domiciliary care providers in Trafford are either inadequate or require improvement.

I turn to what I hope will be in the Green Paper. Let me say first how concerned I am that the CQC system, although it provides assessments, seems to lack real bite

when it comes to bringing about improvements. It seems that providers are given poor assessments and have six months to try to raise their standards, during which time the local authority has some conversations with them but there is a lack of sustained external attention and pressure to ensure that they actually improve, and that by the time the CQC comes back they have not much improved. When a care home or care setting receives a poor assessment, the local authority rightly is no longer prepared to place residents there, which of course means that its income drops further, making it even harder to improve. I would be grateful if Ministers, in preparing the Green Paper, paid particular attention to how we could make that CQC process work better so that it drove improvement, rather than simply providing a picture of what is going wrong.

We have talked about family carers. I absolutely recognise and applaud the work they do. Age UK recently held a focus group in my constituency with family carers, who said they felt it was difficult to find co-ordinated information and support. Very few people plan or choose to be a family carer, and it is incumbent on us to think about ways we can get much better co-ordinated information to them about the support that is available and how they source it. We must also recognise that family care is not always appropriate. Some family members will not be able to provide family care—someone's needs may be too high or the family member may have other commitments. In some cases, the person who requires care will not want a family member to provide intimate care to them.

I want to draw Ministers' attention to a second phenomenon in my constituency that is putting further pressure on the system. The south Asian community in particular has relied heavily on family care, but traditional family patterns in that community are breaking down. We must look to the point in 10, 15 or 20 years' time when we have raised the education and aspirations of women in those communities and they are no longer prepared to stay at home and care for auntie and granny, as previous generations have. We desperately need attention to be paid to building up the provision of culturally appropriate care.

Integration has been much talked about. We are finally making progress with the health and social care partnership in Greater Manchester. I welcome that, because we have talked about integration in Trafford without many visible results for many years. Members touched on working-age adults, for whom integration with just health is missing the point. Many of them are not unhealthy, but they do need integration with employment, education, transport, housing and so on. I hope the Green Paper picks up on that point.

Let me join other hon. Members in talking about funding. We need much greater clarity about what is means-tested and what is universal. We need to think that through in a strategic and rational way. We have all said that it is not right simply to expect those who need care to bear the whole cost of it. We must begin to set up a system that properly enables us to pool and share cost and risk. I am with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) in thinking that that requires us to use a range of measures through progressive taxation. I am also with my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (John Grogan) in saying that that means that inheritance tax, and taxes on assets, have to be part

of the mix. That is necessary to ensure intergenerational fairness and fairness between my constituents in the north of England, where house prices are relatively lower and all someone's assets will be used up paying for care, and those in London and the south-east with much more valuable properties, who may be left with more assets after they pay for their care.

Finally, I say to the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), who sadly is not in the Chamber, that council tax can be only a very small part of the answer, because it produces a very uneven pattern of funding given the very different council tax bases in constituencies around the country.

I would be grateful if the Green Paper picked up, in addition to all the other points that have been made this afternoon, on the specific points I have made. It would make a big difference to people in my constituency who need care today, to their families and to all of us in the future if, finally, this matter was properly and strategically addressed.

6.25 pm

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green).

Four weeks ago today, one of my constituents from the village of Hough attended Parliament to speak at Age UK's parliamentary reception. We meet some people in life whom we will never forget. Joyce Yoxall is one of those people. Those who came to the event will remember her harrowing account of life as an unpaid carer. I was as moved then as I was when I first visited Joyce at her home to discuss the problems she is having with our social care system. Joyce's husband David suffered a stroke in 2014. Since then, she has been forced to stop the care that David should be entitled to because of its high cost and poor quality. She talked about crippling care costs and how she felt she had been "let down". I had to fight back the tears as she spoke about being mentally and physically exhausted, and how she dare not think of the year ahead.

Joyce has literally become the face of hundreds of thousands of people—and maybe more—who are in a similar situation by featuring on the front cover of Age UK's aptly named report, "Why call it care when nobody cares?" The report is the result of 127 interviews regarding the quality of social care that people have experienced. I encourage anybody who has not read the report to do so.

The reason I started by talking about Joyce and David is that I want to remind everybody of the heartbreaking human reality behind the statistics I will refer to later. Let us start by reminding ourselves why those like Joyce might feel let down. As has been mentioned, a growing and ageing population is placing ever more demand on the social care sector, but that should not come as a surprise to anybody who has been living in the real world for at least some of the time in the past few decades.

Almost eight years ago, the Dilnot commission was set up by David Cameron's coalition Government, tasked with making recommendations for changes to the funding of care. It published its recommendations in 2011, including a more generous means-testing threshold and a cap on care costs. That sounded promising, but after

another general election the Government announced that the measures would be delayed until April 2020 and, at around the same time, closed the independent living fund. Then the Government promised to publish a Green Paper in the summer of 2017, but along came yet another general election, during which the current Prime Minister threatened to introduce a dementia tax.

Since then, we have had an autumn Budget in which the Chancellor failed even to mention social care, let alone provide adequate funding. We have seen the Department for Health and Social Care's single departmental plan, which failed to mention the social care workforce. More recently, we had the spring statement, and still there is no lifeline for those with care needs or their families or carers.

We know that at some point, hopefully before the summer recess, the Government will publish their Green Paper on social care for older people, but we do not yet know when any proposals will be implemented after the consultation. To make matters worse, the Green Paper will not cover care for younger adults, which accounts for almost half of all council spending on adult social care.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Laura Smith: No.

There has been one missed opportunity after another—delay, delay, delay. Meanwhile, local councils, which are responsible for delivering social care, are seeing their budgets slashed, and one care home after another is placed in special measures or forced to close. What is the result? Research published recently by *BMJ Open* links cuts to adult social care and health spending to nearly 120,000 excess deaths in England since 2010.

The Care Act 2014 has been about as useful as a chocolate fireguard against a backdrop of inadequate funding and insufficient resources. The legislation has done nothing to protect the 1.2 million older people whose care needs are not being met. Our system clearly places more emphasis on councils setting balanced budgets to an ever-reducing bottom line than it does on making sure that all its residents' care needs are met.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Laura Smith: No.

Cuts have consequences: I refer to my constituent's words—that she

"dare not think of the year ahead."

I do not blame my constituents for having little faith. The past eight years have been nothing but empty promises and never-ending cuts. Fully integrated health and social care would be a good start, but that does not go nearly far enough. We need a whole new approach to disability and ageing based on a commitment to the social model of disability that permeates every aspect of Government.

For example, our social care system needs to be aligned with an appropriate welfare policy and housing strategy, so that we remove as many barriers to disabled people as possible. Access to services should be on the basis of need and not affordability. I wholeheartedly agree that pumping more money into a broken system is no long-term solution.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Laura Smith: I have waited a long time to speak and I am going to carry on.

We need to stop viewing social care as a cost or a burden and instead see it as a wealth creator. Penny-pinching has proved to be a false economy when it comes to social care. It undermines the ability to take preventive action that not only is morally and ethically the right thing to do, but saves money in the long run by reducing the demand on our NHS. We also need to stop neglecting our 1.5 million workers in social care and build a more highly skilled and better-paid workforce. Finally, we need to address the failings of privatised adult social care, as outlined in the 2016 report by the Centre for Health and the Public Interest. Without any real debate, market values have penetrated areas where they do not belong and social care is perhaps the worst example of this. We cannot keep burying our heads in the sand and letting the crisis escalate.

There is no excuse for the Government's inaction. The CQC warned us last year that social care was reaching a "tipping point". This was after the Prime Minister had herself acknowledged that our system is broken. This cruel, callous Conservative Government have turned their back on older people and disabled people up and down this country. They have also repeatedly let down the social care workforce and the invisible army of unpaid carers.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Laura Smith: No.

We need a Government who put people before profits. Until then, I fear that we will be left with the same fragmented, failing system that is letting our constituents down daily.

6.32 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): Thank you for keeping the best until last, Mr Speaker. It is a great honour to speak in this very important debate.

The care home market, both for residential and nursing care, is dominated by the private sector, which holds 86% of all places. It is divided between lucrative self-pay homes and those with local government-funded residents, which are really struggling to cover the growing costs of caring for a population that is living longer, with more complex health needs. Many councils are struggling just to meet their statutory duties on a reduced budget. The Government's decision to push a crisis of their own making on to local government is helping nobody. Central Government funding is totally inadequate. That is why, despite the new funding that has been made available for adult social care, there will still be a funding gap of £2.2 billion by 2020. I hope that this is addressed in the delayed Green Paper.

The Government must accept that their over-reliance on the private sector is not solving the problems in the social care sector and all too often is making them worse. In the last few days, Allied Healthcare has issued warnings and is now searching for a rescue plan. The company cited a rise in the cost of nurses and doctors as a result of tighter immigration rules and a shortage of trainees—problems that were created wholly by Government policy. Across the sector, providers and

councils are reporting difficulties in recruiting from overseas because of the hostile environment created by our Prime Minister.

One of the nine priorities in the Government's "Shared delivery plan: 2015 to 2020" is to

"make sure the health and care system workforce has the right skills and the right number of staff in the most appropriate settings to provide consistently safe and high-quality care."

A report by the National Audit Office published in February shows the extent to which the Government have failed on this. The high turnover rates and difficulty recruiting that the NAO reports can be traced back to central Government underfunding. A cash-starved state is forced to tender contracts for services that private companies can deliver only by paying low wages, cutting corners or exploiting their workforce with zero-hours contracts and unpaid travel time. The Green Paper is an opportunity for the Government to go back to the drawing board on social care funding. Councils need a sustainable settlement, and we need to see adult social care given parity with the health service. Surely this joined-up thinking was why the Department of Health was renamed the Department of Health and Social Care.

6.35 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): We have had a very wide-ranging debate with 16 Back-Bench contributions. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Anna Turley), for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury), for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), for Blaydon (Liz Twist), for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid), for Keighley (John Grogan), for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) and for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) for their passionate, powerful and well-informed contributions. I also thank the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), and the hon. Members for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), for Cheadle (Mary Robinson), for Solihull (Julian Knight) and for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) for their contributions. We might not always see eye to eye, but there is consensus that we have to fix the problem in adult social care, although how we go about that will always be up for debate.

Kevin Hollinrake: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the very constructive cross-party, collegiate visit of the Communities and Local Government Committee to Germany, where we looked at its social insurance scheme, which could provide the perfect, sustainable and scalable solution to the adult social care conundrum?

Andrew Gwynne: The Government need to decide their position, but there are examples across the world of how adult social care can be funded. We need to make sure we get a system that works for England.

I also pay tribute to the workforce and carers. They do not just need platitudes from us in the House; they need the Government and politicians on their side.

This is the second time we have had to call an Opposition day debate on this issue, following the Government's lack of action on social care. In our debate last October, there was broad agreement across the House, as there has been more or less today, that

reform of social care was a priority, but here we are, six months later, and little has changed. Last month, we heard the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care tell the British Association of Social Workers that he accepted his share of responsibility for the lack of progress since the Conservatives entered government in 2010.

The social care Green Paper, due this summer, has faced substantial delays. We need a commitment from the Government that it will not be delayed any further. There is only so much longer that the sector can wait. Let us remember that in January there was hope that the Government would place an extra focus on social care after the Department of Health was rebranded, but then, shortly afterwards, in what sounded like a tribute act to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government told a packed LGA conference—I was there—that

“nothing has changed, nothing has changed”.

Confusion still reigns, and it is true: nothing has changed. This confusion means that 1.2 million people are being denied the support they need.

Let us look at what the cuts mean. According to its director of adult care, social care provision in Northamptonshire County Council—a Conservative council—is

“on the verge of being unsafe”

as a result of the cuts. That council has effectively been the first in England to declare insolvency. According to the director, the additional funds in the local government finance settlement will have “little impact” on the county’s problems, and I fear that that is right, but the Minister will be aware of the widespread fear that what has happened in Northamptonshire could happen again elsewhere. Mark McLaughlin, who was appointed from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in December to oversee Northamptonshire’s finances, has warned that all top-tier local authorities will soon face similar issues. Then, only last week, we heard that Worcestershire County Council, the Conservative-run local authority in the constituency of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, had buried a report expressing urgent concern after rising costs, including the cost of adult social care, had forced the council to use more than half its reserves in the past five years. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy expects the growth in demand to result in a budget deficit of £60.1 million by 2020-21.

Rachel Maclean: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Gwynne: No, I will not. Well, I will, because it is the hon. Lady’s local council.

Rachel Maclean: Worcestershire County Council covers the whole of my constituency, and I am aware of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I want to respond to them, because I too have been worried about the position, as many other people naturally are. I met the chief executive and the leader of the council to address this very issue, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that they have a sustainable plan to deal with it. However, I will of course keep it under review, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising it.

Andrew Gwynne: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for providing me with a nice segue. On Monday, Paul Robinson, the chief executive of her council—Tory Worcestershire County Council—said that

“there comes a point where cost-cutting can’t go any further—there has to be a solution”.

He is right too, but we have yet to hear a Minister even acknowledge that this crisis in social care funding in local government is as serious as it is—and it is a crisis that has its roots in Downing Street. Let us be clear: austerity and cuts in local government budgets have been a political choice by this Government since 2010.

It gets worse. Behind every statistic that I can quote are real people working in the service, real people receiving services, real people requiring services, and families worried about how to support their loved ones. Funding cuts, poor pay, recruitment problems and a lack of support for the sector have hit the quality and availability of adult social care support. In the past year, one in five local authorities has seen more of its care homes rated “inadequate” or “requires improvement”. In some areas, as many as one in two care homes is now rated inadequate.

For some of the most vulnerable, even gaining access to any form of support is difficult. Vulnerable older people with conditions such as dementia and motor neurone disease are being denied support because there is a postcode lottery for treatment. According to *Which?*, where people live can make them 25 times more likely to receive social care support. South Reading paid care costs for 8.7 patients per 50,000 people, while Salford funded 220.3 per 50,000. In Stockport, people are nearly seven times less likely to receive the funding than those just a few miles away in Salford, and patients in Richmond are more than three times more likely to receive it than those in Ealing.

Ministers cannot hide the terms of a social care levy behind flexibilities on council tax. They know, as we know, that in the areas with the greatest need, a small increase in council tax will never make up the shortfall in funding caused by cuts in grants from central Government, which have been slashed by an average of 50% since 2010. That has exacerbated inequality, as poorer areas, which often have many needs, have struggled to raise the funding that they so desperately need. I will use a local example for the Minister. Tameside, one of two local authorities that cover my constituency, will face a £33 million funding gap in adult social care in the next three years, yet a 1% increase on council tax raises just over £700,000—never, ever enough to plug that gap.

The news that Allied Healthcare, one of the biggest providers of home care, has fallen into financial difficulty shows the impact that is being felt in the sector. The fact that 150 councils rely on Allied Healthcare should send shivers down the spines of Ministers. We got no real answers or any assurances from the Government that they were taking these developments seriously or putting in place emergency contingency measures to ensure that we do not see a repeat of the Carillion collapse.

There are four reasons that people now give for their dissatisfaction with social care: staff shortages, long waiting times, a lack of funding, and Government reforms. That is coming not just from the Opposition; the same concerns that we have raised today are being raised in living rooms and care homes across England. The Government have a duty to respond, and I commend our motion to the House.

6.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price): I should open with a thank you to those Members who have made some very thoughtful contributions to today's debate. We recognise the challenge we face, and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) put it most strongly when she said that it is the result of something very positive: that we are all living longer. That requires some serious strategic thought about how we fund social care. It is in that spirit that we are rising to the challenge.

Both Opposition Front Benchers, the hon. Members for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) and for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), expressed their dissatisfaction with the speed with which we are pursuing these reforms, but it is important that we get it right and that we take people with us. With that in mind, we have put together an advisory group to work with on the reforms. The whole sector is co-operating with us and actively contributing to the debate, because it more than anyone recognises the need to fix this and get the solutions right. I make no apologies for the fact that we are where we are now, but we are well down the track with the process. In the spirit of cross-party consensus that I have heard a lot about this afternoon, I will not get into some of the partisan points that have been made, but I want to set the context of where we are with the debate. When we introduce the Green Paper, I hope it will be received in the spirit of the comments that we have heard from most hon. Members today.

Debbie Abrahams: The Minister who opened the debate was unable to respond to my question, so I will repeat it to this Minister. What assessment have the Government made of the impact of social care cuts on the ability of disabled people to live independently, and will she apologise to those disabled people for what the UN has described as this Government's "grave and systematic violations" against disabled people?

Jackie Doyle-Price: To be frank with the hon. Lady, one of our priorities is to make sure that disabled people can live independently for longer. That is very much a central part of our approach and we are making more money available for it. *[Interruption.]* She can sit and smile, but that informs our approach.

I should also like to associate myself with the comments made by a large number of colleagues in paying tribute to the hard-working, committed people who make up our social care workforce and to the informal carers who play such a vital part in our health and social care system. Central to the points made by the hon. Members for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for Keighley (John Grogan) is that we all collectively need to send a clear message that the work that those people do is valued. We are working with Skills for Care to put more value on this as a profession. People who work in the care sector do so because they are personally motivated and money actually matters less to them. We ought to give them a clear message that we really appreciate all the efforts that they make.

Many Members have raised the issue of funding cuts to council budgets. That subject obviously informed the comments from the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish just now. I will not run away from the fact that there have been challenges for councils in recent times—

[Interruption.] Opposition Members mention cuts, but the bottom line is that we can only spend what we collect from taxpayers. That is the reality of the situation. I will be first in the queue to pay tribute to those councils that have stepped up to the challenge, coped well with the reductions and worked hard to become efficient. They have shown real innovation in rising to the challenge.

Andrew Gwynne: I fully appreciate the Minister's point that we can only spend the money that we raise from taxes, but this is a question of priorities. Why did she vote for a £5 billion cut to the bank levy in the Budget? Is that not the wrong priority?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I think the hon. Gentleman will find that we actually have a very progressive tax paying system none the less.

I want to celebrate those areas that have continued to deliver their social care responsibilities in challenging circumstances. We have heard a lot about what has gone wrong, but let us just remember this statistic: 81% of people in care homes are in homes that have been rated good or outstanding. I think that is an achievement, and something to be celebrated. I also want to compliment those councils that have really stepped up to the plate to deliver an improved performance on delayed transfers of care. Stoke and Trafford in particular have cut their delayed discharges by more than half. This comes down to leadership and determination. Where councils show real leadership, that will deliver improvements and change—*[Interruption.]* I have just named those councils: Stoke and Trafford.

Kate Green: The Minister is right to say that we are making progress on delayed transfers of care, but the figures have been very high. It really comes down to the fact that we just do not have enough well-funded places to enable people to be discharged from hospital quickly and get into the care in the community that we all want them to have.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I do not disagree with that point. That is why we need to embark on a process of reform and really get it right. We are embarking on the process on that basis.

A number of Members, including the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), mentioned sleep-ins, and I just want to restate what was said, because it seems to have been misunderstood. We fully recognise the pressure on the sector resulting from the ruling on sleep-ins and the fact that the historical liabilities could be a problem. We are working closely with providers, in liaison with the European Commission, to come up with a solution. Hon. Members will understand that the matter is too commercially sensitive for me to say any more than that—*[Interruption.]* We are working with providers and meeting them on a regular basis.

Liz Twist: I understand what the Minister has just said about sleep-ins and that she is working with providers. We all understand the pressure on those providers, but I asked earlier, are we looking at a way to reward the staff properly for the work they do during sleep-ins, or are we trying to avoid the question?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The ruling from HMRC is clear that those on sleep-in shifts are still entitled to the minimum wage, so we are working out a solution to those historical liabilities. We are clear that we expect all employers to abide by the national minimum wage legislation, and I hope that that gives the hon. Lady some clarity on that point.

We can expect the Green Paper to be brought forward, but I also want to address what Members have said about the variation in quality and availability of provision. As has been said, local councils are responsible for responding to that, and the CQC has rated 81% of care services as good, but it is important that we work with those that are performing less well to achieve significant improvements so that everyone is entitled to the best possible care.

I was pleased to hear the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green). His philosophical approach perhaps reflects the amount of time that he has spent thinking about this topic. I associate myself with the comment made by him and several Members across the House about the fact that no one has an unblemished record when it comes to debates about social care. If we are genuinely to come up with a long-term solution, we need a spirit of consensus to take people with us, and people on both sides of the House need to remember that.

In conclusion, we have had a full debate and it will not be the last time that we debate this subject. We are now quite a way down the track when it comes to working up real proposals to bring genuine reforms of the social care system to equip ourselves for a world where life expectancy ends not at 70, but at 100. That will require significant change. We are stepping up to the challenge and will bring forward proposals in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes that Government cuts to council budgets have resulted in a social care funding crisis; further notes that Government failure to deal with this crisis has pushed the funding problem on to councils and council tax payers and has further increased the funding gap for social care; is concerned that there is an unacceptable variation in the quality and availability of social care across the country with worrying levels of unmet need for social care; and calls on the Government to meet the funding gap for social care this year and for the rest of this Parliament.

Barbara Keeley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The motion that has just been unanimously agreed calls on the Government

“to meet the funding gap for social care”—

widely said to be £1.3 billion—

“this year and for the rest of this Parliament.”

Given that Ministers have agreed to the motion, can you advise when we might expect an announcement from the Government on this important agreement on social care funding?

Mr Speaker: The most pertinent response that I can offer to the hon. Lady—I understand her perfectly legitimate point of order—is as follows. On 26 October 2017—obviously this was done in the light of a number of Opposition-day debates and motions voted thereon—the Leader of the House said in a written ministerial statement:

“Where a motion tabled by an opposition party has been approved by the House, the relevant Minister will respond to the resolution of the House by making a statement no more than 12 weeks after the debate.”—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2017; Vol. 630, col. 12WS.]

That is the position as things stand. The hon. Lady has registered her point with considerable force, it is on the record, and I do not dispute the fact of what she said about the motion being carried unanimously.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, I propose to take motions 4 and 5 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Crime and Courts Act 2013 (Deferred Prosecution Agreements) (Amendment of Specified Offences) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 26 February, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Transport Levying Bodies (Amendment) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 19 March, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, I propose to take motions 6 to 10 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6) and Order of 20 March),

LEGISLATIVE REFORM MEASURE

That the Legislative Reform Measure (HC 785) passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which it was laid before Parliament.

MISSION AND PASTORAL ETC. (AMENDMENT) MEASURE

That the Mission and Pastoral etc. (Amendment) Measure (HC 784), passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which it was laid before Parliament.

ECCLESIASTICAL JURISDICTION AND CARE OF CHURCHES MEASURE

That the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure (HC 783), passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which it was laid before Parliament.

PENSIONS (PRE-CONSOLIDATION) MEASURE

That the Pensions (Pre-Consolidation) Measure (HC 782), passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which it was laid before Parliament.

STATUTE LAW (REPEALS) MEASURE

That the Statute Law (Repeals) Measure (HC 781), passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which it was laid before Parliament.—(*Dame Caroline Spelman.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Mount Wise Tower Block Cladding

6.59 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition relating to the combustible cladding on the Mount Wise tower blocks in Plymouth. I thank Bill Stevens, the Labour councillor for Devonport, for starting the petition, which has been signed by hundreds of people across Plymouth. I also thank Sarah and her team at Devonport Live, a community café, for rallying the community behind this campaign.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport,

Declares that, in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, safety measures in high-rise housing across the country need to be re-evaluated; further that the three Mount Wise tower blocks urgently need to be re-clad to ensure the towers are safe for people to live in and live near.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to allocate funding for the re-cladding of the Mount Wise tower blocks as a matter of urgency.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002138]

Fibromyalgia as a Disability

7.1 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I rise to present a petition relating to the recognition of fibromyalgia as a disability, the need for greater research into the causes and treatment of fibromyalgia, and the need for greater awareness of fibromyalgia. The petition was started by my constituents Adrienne and Leann Lakin and has been signed by 1,379 people from across the United Kingdom. The petition should be seen alongside the Change.org petition of the same title that has been signed by 104,551 people—the number is going up all the time—which demonstrates vividly that this is an issue that reaches into every single Member's constituency.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that fibromyalgia should be considered a disability; further that individuals with the disease struggle daily and often do not receive the medical help or support that could and should be provided; and further that other nations such as the United States of America, are leading the way in fibromyalgia research, but the United Kingdom is not following suit.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to recognise fibromyalgia as a disability at last.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002141]

Digital Images and Consent

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Freer.)

7.3 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The taking of digital images without consent, and particularly the lack of recourse in law for victims, is a very serious issue. I pay tribute to a very brave woman, my constituent Emily, who has chosen to speak out about her experience in the hope that we can secure a change in the law. I hope that by speaking about her ordeal today, I, along with other Members who I know share an interest in this issue, can encourage others to share their experience with us so we can add their voices to persuading the Government of the need for action.

Emily found herself alone in a hotel room with a strange man. There is the prospect of legal action, so I will skip over the detail of everything that happened that day, but it came to light later that this man had filmed Emily for just over a minute while she was asleep and naked. This video was not, as far as anyone knows, distributed to any third party, uploaded online, shared or transferred to other digital platforms. The video was taken on that ubiquitous modern-day accessory, a mobile phone.

Prior to today's debate, I have been in contact with the Government about what plans they have to legislate. So far, the answer is none, although I thank the Minister for the detailed response that came from her Department. I want to highlight today the concerns I have with the Government's response and to push her to see what she can do to take this back into the heart of Government and push for change herself. Before I do that, I want to highlight the fact that, although my debate is focusing on this private video, there is a wider theme here. As I am sure you are aware, Mr Speaker, the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) is promoting a private Member's Bill to ban upskirting—that is when someone takes a photograph up someone's skirt. Upskirting has been banned in Scotland since 2009, and I raise the issue because its prevalence, and therefore the impact, has been exacerbated as well by the growth of mobile phone use.

That is one reason the Government's response is not good enough. No one, least of all Emily, expects a change in the law to be without its challenges, but in this modern digital world we need laws that deal with the reality of life.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this matter to the House for consideration. Does she agree that her constituent's case has made it clear that the law is far from settled and that our role in this place is primarily to clarify ethical issues and enshrine them in legislation? Thus far, that has not happened in this area and so we need a change urgently.

Meg Hillier: Absolutely. I will go on to highlight some of the expert advice we have had about where there may be possibility for change or interpretation of the law as it stands. Currently, the law does not appear to recognise the difference between viewing someone naked, and filming or photographing someone naked

without their consent. I put it to Members: should it be legal for someone, whether a stranger, partner, spouse or friend, to film another person naked without their consent when they are in a private situation? Most people would say no. None of us would want bad law made in hurry, so I understand the Government may not want to rush into this, and although the initial response may have been disappointing, I get where they are coming from. However, they do need to tackle this issue. This may not be affecting that many people now, although we do not know the full extent of it, but this issue is not likely to go away while people have mobile phones in their pockets. It causes great distress, so the Government do need to think about the impact on the individuals concerned and they have to consider a way forward.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Does she share my concern that the sheer plethora of legislation—30-plus pieces, one of which dates back to 1861—to deal with digital abuse is unsuitable for the 21st century? Does she agree that criminal justice professionals need training in this area, as well as our needing to consider new powers?

Meg Hillier: I thank the hon. Lady very much for that. She rightly highlights the fact that there is law in this area but it does not fit modern purposes and it is very complicated for people to navigate their way through. It is not beyond the wit of Government to pull some of that together, perhaps under a future legislative vehicle, if not a law in its own right.

Everybody has a camera in their pocket and everyone has a laptop with a tiny camera in their bedroom. The Government responded to me, saying that:

“we would not necessarily want to criminalise all photographic images depicting naked people without consent because there might be legitimate use for that data in some circumstances.”

I asked the Minister what circumstances those might be, and I am going to go on to talk about some of that in a moment. The Government also say it would be unreasonable to seek consent in all cases, and they give the examples of a streaker at a sports event or a public event that involves nudity. I am sure, Mr Speaker, that you are so busy in the House that you may not have noticed that there are sometimes naked bike rides around Parliament Square. There is a big difference between what we are discussing and someone choosing to get on a bicycle naked in Parliament Square—I do not think anybody would say that there is a reasonable expectation of privacy in those circumstances.

The reasonable expectation of privacy is used to define a “private act” under section 67 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. It states that a person commits an offence of voyeurism if

“(a) for the purpose of obtaining sexual gratification, he observes another person doing a private act, and

(b) he knows that the other person does not consent to being observed for his sexual gratification.”

The Act goes on to state that:

“For the purposes of section 67, a person is doing a private act if the person is in a place which, in the circumstances, would reasonably be expected to provide privacy”.

Those words are important in this context. It goes on to say

“and—

(a) the person’s genitals, buttocks or breasts are exposed or covered only with underwear,

(b) the person is using a lavatory, or

(c) the person is doing a sexual act that is not of a kind ordinarily done in public.”

The Crown Prosecution Service appears to have dismissed Emily’s complaint about the video as the circumstances were such that there was no reasonable expectation of privacy. Even if she had been in the room consensually with another person, there is not a reasonable expectation that the other person would not “observe” her sleeping naked in bed. However, the law does not appear to recognise the difference between “observing” and, crucially, recording for posterity, regardless of intent to distribute or publish. Had the image been published or distributed, we would have been having a different debate today.

The 2003 law appears to address a “peeping Tom” scenario—that is, someone secretly viewing or observing a private act. The issue I am raising today is the situation of someone being photographed or filmed without consent when doing a private act—surreptitious filming of a private act—when they would reasonably expect not to be filmed without giving their consent. That is what happened to my constituent.

I should also make a very clear divide between this issue and revenge porn. If things are published or distributed, that is a very different area. That is not what I am talking about today, although it is of course a very serious issue.

I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who has also been pursuing this matter. A response to him from the CPS gives me some hope, and I hope that the Minister will take heed of these words. It states that

“the conclusion could be reached that there is a reasonable expectation of privacy in respect of being filmed naked whilst asleep. However, the law is far from settled but this is certainly an argument which could be reasonably advanced.”

It is often the case that when there is more than one lawyer, there is more than one opinion, and I suspect that Government lawyers have come down on one side at the moment but will, I hope, take those words away and consider them.

If we asked most people whether they would be happy to be filmed or photographed doing a private act without having consented, by any other person—a partner, a spouse or a stranger—despite that other person having been present in the room, most would say no. I am not just assuming that. An opinion survey helpfully carried out by Opinium found that three in four—76%—of UK adults think that it is currently illegal in the UK to video without their consent someone over 18 who is naked. That is the general expectation of the public, and is way out when it comes to the law. Four in five UK adults would support a change in the law so that videoing someone over 18 who is naked, without their consent, becomes illegal in all circumstances. Of course, that latter point is from an answer to an opinion survey, and I recognise that for the Government to legislate they would have to consider carefully whether they wanted to cover all circumstances and how it would be defined, but the Government are here to legislate. They have drafters. They could work through how this could be delivered.

To highlight the distress, when I was researching this matter in preparation for today, I came across a debate on a Mumsnet forum from 2013—this is not new, sadly. This demonstrates the hurt and damage that this does. The person writing was a married woman checking emails on her husband's phone, and she writes that

“something made me look at his photos. I found some taken of me, asleep on the sofa, photos of my cleavage. There was also video footage of me getting undressed in the bedroom the night before. Disgusted, I challenged him that night... We had a big row, he promised the photos were not posted on the Internet, and that he didn't know why he'd done it.”

She goes on

“fast forwarded to now and I've just found some photos of me taken on our recent holiday, me asleep on the sunbed, photos of my bottom, and my breasts. I feel sick. I can't trust him anymore”.

That underlines the human hurt in a situation such as this.

If we look at the criteria under which the media have to operate, we can see that although the use of photography in the press is self-regulatory, the editors' code of practice for the Independent Press Standards Organisation states:

“It is unacceptable to photograph individuals, without their consent, in public or private places where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy”.

Many Members of this House are very well aware of that. However, nowadays everyone is a photojournalist in respect of their own, and others', life story. Many young people, in particular, record their lives online and it is time for better regulation in this area.

Since I wrote to the Government, there has been some progress. The Secretary of State for Justice said yesterday that he is reviewing the law to make sure that it is fit for purpose in relation to upskirting. He has indicated that he is looking at the matter, and I urge the Minister, who I know is a very reasonable and thoughtful woman, to take away what I have said, talk to the Ministry of Justice, because I recognise that this issue falls between the two Departments, and urge the Secretary of State to consider taking forward this issue in the review of upskirting and in the review of the use of digital photography. There are many victims out there who have not come forward, but even if there is only one, it is one too many to have this distress. It is time for the Government seriously to consider proper legislation.

7.15 pm

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): I thank the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) for securing this debate and I congratulate her on it. This is a very important issue. I associate myself with much of what she said particularly the tribute she paid to her constituent, Emily, about whom we have corresponded, and with whom I have also corresponded.

We are living through a digital and technological revolution. The tech sector is one of our fastest-growing industries, which is creating hundreds of thousands of good high-skilled jobs up and down the country, and is therefore at the heart of our modern industrial strategy. We will continue to invest in the best new innovations and ideas, in the brightest and best talent, and in revolutionary digital infrastructure. It is absolutely right that this dynamic sector has our full backing, but, while we want the sector to remain free to innovate and to

continue to do good, we must guard against the harms to our society that it can facilitate. Some of those harms are very considerable indeed, as exemplified by the hon. Lady's speech today.

When it comes to the use of digital images, there are a number of existing laws that may apply, from data protection to criminal laws, as the hon. Lady mentioned. For example, digital images containing personal features can be considered personally identifiable information and thus their processing may be governed by data protection laws. Organisations and individuals may have a legitimate need to take, store and share digital images of individuals—for example, sporting events wanting to display athletes and spectators, private premises wanting to use digital images in crime prevention and security, and media organisations for journalistic purposes. I mention those things because if we are to consider new law, we must take into account the panoply of potential. In some of these instances, consent is sought. However, consent will not always be a lawful basis for processing personal data. For example, there may be a legitimate interest to process personal data. A legitimate interest could be a commercial interest, an individual interest, or societal benefits. In journalism, for example, our data protection laws enable processing where publication is in the public interest. However, the use of photography will still be subject to regulatory standards and codes of practice adopted by the publishers and the press.

It is unacceptable to photograph individuals without their consent in public or private places where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy. There must not be persistence in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist and journalists cannot remain on a property when asked to leave, or follow people. If requested, journalists must identify themselves and whom they represent.

Regulators also issue separate guidance regarding the photography of children. It is worth noting that data protection laws do not apply to processing activities undertaken in personal household or family settings. The Government have taken the position that to do otherwise would be to improperly extend the reach of regulation into personal lives—although I must say that I was very moved by the example that the hon. Lady read out from the Mumsnet service.

Meg Hillier: I know that the Minister is a thoughtful woman and I am pleased that she is pausing for thought on this matter. There is an interesting point here about regulation in the home. I understand the political difficulty of legislating for things that take place in the home, but we do legislate against domestic violence and child abuse, and on other safety matters. These take place in the privacy of people's homes, so it is not beyond the wit of Government to tackle this issue, even with those caveats.

Margot James: The hon. Lady makes some good points. I shall consider those examples. Intrusive behaviour and sexual harassment may take place in the home and, as she says, the law does not stop at people's front doors, nor should it.

As I said, data protection laws do not apply to processing activities undertaken in personal households. Data protection laws do, however, apply when digital images are shared online—as they so often are—or

made public in some other way. The Data Protection Bill will empower people to take control of their data, and strengthen their rights to move or delete personal data. That includes the use of images. We expect online platforms to have robust processes in place to remove images or user accounts that do not comply with the law or their own policies.

Our internet safety strategy Green Paper, which was published last October, set out the three key principles that underpin our online safety work. First, what is unacceptable offline should be unacceptable online. Secondly, all users should be empowered to manage online risks and stay safe. Thirdly, technology companies have a responsibility to their users. We will shortly be publishing the Government's response to the strategy consultation, and this will set out further details on how we plan to tackle a wide range of online harms. When considering privacy rights, individuals or organisations that process personal data should consider alongside data protection law compliance with a wide range of legislation, including the Communications Act 2003, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the European convention on human rights.

In relation to explicit images, some images recorded may depict persons who are, for example, naked, and we would not want the law to prevent that from occurring in all cases. But under data protection law, data controllers are already under duties to keep the data safe and secure, and not to hold on to it longer than necessary. Moreover, if any images recorded were subsequently used by an individual for the purposes of sexual gratification, other offences may then be relevant.

The hon. Lady mentioned the offence of voyeurism, which criminalises non-consensual photography and the filming of certain private acts when taken for the purpose of obtaining sexual gratification, as well as for a number of other offences that may have related relevance—for example, the outraging of public decency and revenge pornography offences.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the specific legislation that has been passed in Scotland since a tailor-made offence was introduced in 2011. I point out that there have been only four prosecutions for upskirting since

that Act was introduced. The Act was presumably passed because Scottish law did not previously capture the behaviour that she mentioned. That behaviour is captured to a large extent—although potentially not wholly—by the voyeurism offence set out in sections 67 and 68 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The offence applies when someone observes or records another person engaging in a private act without that person's consent, with the intention of looking at that image or another person looking at that image for the purpose of obtaining sexual gratification.

The hon. Lady also drew attention to the remarks made by my ministerial colleagues in the Ministry of Justice. I am not sure whether this is the exact quote that she read out, but I was encouraged when my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary said this in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) about the policy on upskirting:

"I am sympathetic to calls for a change in the law, and my officials are reviewing the current law to make sure that it is fit for purpose. As part of that work, we are considering the private Member's Bill that is being promoted by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse)." —[*Official Report*, 24 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 724.]

I have also had conversations with my right hon. Friend, and we are in agreement that more must be done in Government to look at this very difficult area. Much of it is covered by the offence of voyeurism and, in the upskirting context, by offences that occur in a public place. The two Acts I mentioned deal in large part with the issues of concern that the hon. Lady spoke of, but it seems that they may not wholly cover them. I, too, was encouraged by the letter from the Director of Public Prosecutions.

I can assure the hon. Lady that the Government are considering these matters, including upskirting, and we will continue to do so. I thank her for her very detailed research into this area, which will undoubtedly contribute to the Government's thinking.

Question put and agreed to.

7.26 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 25 April 2018

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

Protecting Children in Conflict Areas

9.30 am

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered protecting children in conflict areas.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank the Minister for being here to respond and hon. Members from across the House who have joined me for this important discussion.

I want to begin with a question. Why are photographs taken of children in warzones, which are the most arresting, harrowing and distressing to viewers? It is because they get to the heart of the matter. Children are the ones who suffer the most, yet have the least involvement with the players and actors of war. Children are the ones we all relate to, either because we are parents of children ourselves, or because we have all been children and like to look back at that time more often than not as being happy, loving and with fond memories.

We all remember from autumn 2015 the photograph of Alan Kurdi that was splashed across newspapers, which I have in my hands—that lifeless body lying down, washed up on the Mediterranean shore with his trainers still on his feet, after fleeing with his family from war in Syria. He drowned alongside his mother and brother, trying to reach safety in Greece. Some of us may also know the photograph of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh, sitting dazed and bloodied, with soulless eyes, in the back of an ambulance after surviving a regime airstrike in Aleppo. Yesterday, a new photograph emerged, taken from a video, of a young boy in a green shirt, hugging a man's lifeless body—probably his father. He is screaming and crying, after Saudi-led airstrikes at a wedding party in northern Yemen killed at least 20 people, including the bride, and injured 45 others. I ask hon. Members to keep those images in mind for the rest of the debate.

With the growing instability around the world, new kinds of war are developing that are very different from the traditional method of thousands of mobilised soldiers fighting one another on open battlefields. Now, new weapons and patterns of conflict, which include deliberate attacks against civilians, are increasingly turning children into targets of war. This is why now more than ever, we need to make sure we protect children in conflicts. The shocking images on our television screens and in our newspapers of children in warzones come from the most dangerous conflict-affected countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia, but also from other regions such as Myanmar, where almost 400,000 Rohingya children have had to flee to Bangladesh for safety.

Despite the collective efforts of the international community, brutal tactics are still commonly used against children. They are suffering things that no child ever should. They are used as suicide bombers and their homes, schools and playgrounds have become battlefields.

The widespread use of indiscriminate weapons, such as cluster munitions, barrel bombs and improvised explosive devices, make no distinction between soldiers and children.

To give just a few examples, in South Sudan, around 13,000 children have been recruited to fight by all sides of the conflict, putting their lives at risk and changing their future forever. In Myanmar, the atrocities include girls being raped, infants being beaten to death with spades and children being forced to witness soldiers execute their families. Girls and boys in refugee camps who have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh told World Vision that they fear violence daily. Almost half a million child refugees in Bangladesh face extreme danger, as the monsoon season approaches. In Syria, one in five school children are forced to cross lines of fire just to go to school. In Yemen, it is estimated that one child dies every 10 minutes because of extreme hunger and disease resulting from conflict.

The examples do not happen just in far-away places. Closer to home, on Europe's doorstep, the conflict in Ukraine has destroyed or damaged an average of two schools every week for the past four years. Areas where children used to play and learn are now littered with landmines, killing and injuring dozens of children a year. Those children are innocent bystanders in times of conflict, caught up in the violence taking place around them. I could go on and on.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on getting this timely debate. If we do not have the debate, all these things tend to fade into the distant past. One of the areas that does not get much attention is China. We have seen on television that schools have been bulldozed, leaving minority children in particular with a lack of education to advance themselves in future. We could do more to take children from some of those areas into this country. I do not think we have met the targets for taking refugee children.

Chris Law: I welcome the comments from the hon. Gentleman; they are a message to the Minister to reconsider renewing the Dubs amendment, which brought Syrian children here. I welcome the observations on China.

Last month, Save the Children published the report, "The War on Children" at the Munich Security Conference. The report shows that more than 350 million children around the world are living in conflict zones. Let us pause for a minute: that is one in every six children on earth, and an increase of 75% since the 1990s. Those are harrowing figures. The images I asked hon. Members to remember at the beginning of the debate are only three of those.

The report found that nearly half of those children are in areas affected by high-intensity conflict, where they could be vulnerable to the UN's six grave violations, which are killing and maiming, recruitment and use of children, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and—last, but certainly not least—the denial of humanitarian assistance. As I touched on at the beginning of my speech, the shocking increase in the number of children growing up in areas affected by conflict has been fuelled primarily by a growing disregard for the rules of war and indiscriminate violence in countries such as Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan and Myanmar.

[Chris Law]

Furthermore, the increasingly destructive nature of modern armed conflict intensifies the trauma that children experience, and usually leads to long-term mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression. The psychological impact of living in conflict zones can lead to a vicious cycle of conflict, in which the next generation struggles to rebuild peaceful societies following the trauma of violence.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the difficulties is not only the mental and physical health of those children, but their future education? In Syria, for example, the war is in its eighth year, so a whole generation of children has been denied the chance to prepare themselves to become the educated people that Syria will need.

Chris Law: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. Every child needs a safe environment where health and education are paramount.

In other words, history will repeat itself through our lack of intervention and as the vicious cycle continues. The findings of this report are stark and the message is clear: we need to take concerted, collective action to turn back the tide of brutality and indifference, and to better protect children in conflict; otherwise, woe betide any chance of conducting peaceful resolutions to conflict on earth in the future.

Turning my attention to the UK Government, the UK is well placed to globally champion measures that will protect and improve the lives of children caught up in conflict. Previous welcome initiatives, such as the UK leadership on preventing sexual violence in conflict and global campaigns on cluster munitions and landmines, have demonstrated that changes in policy and practice can limit the impact of conflict on civilians.

I welcome last week's announcement by the Foreign Secretary that the UK is now signed up to the safe schools declaration, which commits the UK to take concrete measures towards protecting education in conflict. However, I urge the Minister to commit to going further to protect children in conflict and to introduce practical measures to reduce the impact of conflict on children. They must include updating the Government's civilian protection strategy to include a focus on explosive weapons in populated areas and measures to address challenges surrounding that, and improving civilian harm tracking procedures by creating and implementing a cross-Government framework, so that child casualties are properly monitored and reported.

Furthermore, funding must be put in place for conflict prevention initiatives, peacekeeping and training for military forces on child protection. We cannot expect to implement these measures without funding designated for that purpose.

There is no doubt that more needs to be done to help children after violence has come to an end. The UK Government have the opportunity to play a leading role in responding to the psychosocial challenges of childhood trauma in conflict. We must therefore invest in programmes for children affected, including providing the right mental health support, training local mental health and social workers and assisting children with disabilities.

Children must be at the centre of reconstruction efforts, which means including them in peacebuilding initiatives and social stability. Those children are the most powerful actors in reconciliation and recovery from conflict. I urge the Minister consistently to champion independent accountability mechanisms at the UN, including stronger justice systems to hold perpetrators of crime to account, and investigations into potential grave violations of children's rights. I look forward to hearing views from across the House on what we can do to help innocent children who are caught up in conflicts around the world and exposed to the most serious forms of violence imaginable.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman, who said that 350 million children around the world are suffering because of war. Does he agree that we should focus a lot more on prevention of such conflicts, bearing in mind the huge impact that they have on young people, including in later life?

Chris Law: I agree, but unfortunately certain nation states decide that war is their only option, and children are the biggest casualties of that. Prevention of war would be the ultimate best step forward, and children who have unfortunately been caught up in war in their own nations should be involved in any future prevention strategies. All children deserve peace, safety, security, and an opportunity to thrive in life, and no effort should be spared to give them a better future, free from the horrors of war. All hon. Members must fight tooth and nail to ensure that every child has access to health, education and a safe environment free from conflict and war.

I began this debate by asking Members to consider three images of young children caught up in conflict that we, and the world, are well aware of today, and I will conclude by reminding us all that such images are nothing new. Back in 1972, another image that we are all aware of shocked the world. It is of a child nicknamed "napalm girl". She was only nine years old, naked and screaming in pain, and running towards a photographer after an aerial napalm attack on a village. That image helped to bring the Vietnam war to a close one year later. The name of that girl is Kim Phúc, and today she lives in Toronto with her family. Not only is she a motivational speaker, but she also helps other child victims of war around the world. Sadly, however, her story is unique and does not reflect the grave situation we face today. Let us begin to put an end to such photographs in our media, and to the horrific statistics of one in every six children worldwide living in conflict. Until then, however, let us keep those photos in our mind, and focus on the real losers in war, who are of course the children.

9.42 am

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and to follow the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) who has secured this important debate. As he rightly said at the end of his speech, children suffer more than anybody else. They lose their parents, their family networks, and their brothers and sisters. Indeed, members of the International Development Committee

saw that in action in some of the areas we visited. We saw lost children who were being looked after, but not necessarily by their parents. That is a tragedy, as it is to see men and women who have lost their children and are terrorised by the thought of what has happened to them. On a recent visit to Bangladesh we saw a grown man crying. He had fled, but had not been able to go as fast as the rest of his family, and apart from one small son, he did not know what had happened to them. That is the tragedy of war. He has one young son left, and he has no idea whether he will ever see the rest of his family and his other children. That is why this debate is so important.

The hon. Gentleman reminded us of very important images brought back by journalists who, at times, have risked their lives. That is important because such images send a powerful message to everybody, and we have all been moved at different times by these terrible and traumatic photographs. The sad inevitability of war means that, unfortunately, the children who populate the countries involved in conflict are affected by it, either through recruitment and their use in hostilities, or—probably more frequently—as innocent bystanders. Armed conflicts have left children vulnerable to appalling forms of violence, sexual exploitation, abduction, mutilation, forced displacement, and amputations if they step on land mines, as happened a huge amount in Vietnam.

Conflict also impacts on the availability of education and children's development. We heard today about the conflict in Syria, which has lasted eight years, meaning that a couple of generations of children are missing out on education. Although we are committed to helping children in conflict areas to receive education, it is incredibly difficult to ensure that they get the appropriate education, in the right language and with the right curriculum, because they have probably moved to another country to be safe. As the Committee saw in Lebanon, Jordan and other places, it is difficult for aid agencies to set up schools in refugee camps. I feel that we must redouble our efforts because once a child misses out on education, it is incredibly difficult ever to catch up.

Victoria Prentis: Given that we are taking part in a Save the Children sponsored event, does my hon. Friend agree that we should thank such organisations for the enormously good work they do, particularly in Jordan? We in this country should be grateful to the countries such as Jordan and Lebanon that surround Syria, because in some ways they are risking the education of their own children by running a two-shift system in schools every day to enable refugee children to be educated.

Mrs Latham: I was not aware that this was a Save the Children sponsored event; I thought it was a debate secured by the hon. Member for Dundee West. It does not really matter who started it—it is an important debate. We should be incredibly grateful to Jordan and Lebanon, which have done an amazing job. They both have relatively small populations that have been overwhelmed by the numbers of refugees, but at least the people in those refugee camps speak their language and can be taught in local schools. The money that the Government and the Department for International Development have sent to keep those people in their own region has been incredibly valuable. If and when they can go back to Syria, they are not too far away and

will not have lost their traditions, customs and language. Unfortunately, if they came to Europe they would have to do that. They would be able to keep those traditions to a certain extent, but if huge numbers of refugees came to Britain it would be very difficult for them. They would have to learn English, just as they would have to learn French or German if they went to the countries that speak those languages. We owe huge gratitude to countries that have willingly taken in refugees, even if there will be tensions in different areas.

Education is incredibly important. If children lose the opportunity of education, they are more likely to take up activities that most people would prefer young children not to get involved in. Children are more likely to become radicalised if they are disaffected, upset and have no education to cling on to, and they will have no hope of a proper job unless they have received at least basic, if not further, education. We have put a huge amount of money—indeed, we are the largest contributor—into Education Cannot Wait, which is the first global movement of aid funding dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises. Through that we are targeting some of the world's most vulnerable children, and aiming to reach 3.4 million children through the first set of investments—an incredibly ambitious target.

I am concerned, and I have spoken repeatedly, about the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by UK peacekeepers and other personnel operating in the name of the United Nations. There has been recognition of that by the media in recent months and we have discussed it in the International Development Committee. From what evidence there is, it appears that there is a real macho culture, and a white western culture, among some of the aid organisations. Obviously, I am not talking about the majority of people who work in the aid industry, but it permeates many of the organisations working there. It is not good enough to say, "Well, they are away from home for a very long time, and they are tired." There is no excuse for any form of sexual exploitation, particularly when it affects children, but also when it affects women. It should not happen.

There is now, from the office of the special representative on children and armed conflict, a framework of six grave violations, which are monitored and reported on annually: recruitment or use of children as soldiers; killing and maiming of children; sexual violence against children, which is incredibly important because they do not recover easily from something like that; attacks on schools or hospitals, which have happened again and again in Syria; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access. It might be interesting for the Committee to look at the reports over time, and the results.

I am particularly concerned about the number of children who are now affected, not just in Syria but worldwide. A huge number live in conflict zones and they need every bit of help that we can give them. I should be interested to hear from the Minister how we are doing. I know that 50% of DFID's funding is directed towards fragile states and regions, and that is important because those children deserve all the help they can get.

Nutrition is one area of particular concern. Some children live in areas where we cannot get nutrition to them. If they do not get the right nutrition in their first 1,000 days, they are stunted for life and will always

[Mrs Latham]

struggle to get a decent education and a proper job. As my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) commented, it is important that they can eventually get a job, and they need help while they are in the conflict zone. There will be a time of rebuilding afterwards, and particularly in places such as Syria one would hope for an educated workforce that could come back. There is a need to educate young people now, so that they can replace the educated adults affected by the situation as they get older, and fulfil their roles in jobs; there will be a huge amount to do when they eventually go back to their country.

I am pleased that DFID officials co-hosted a high-level Wilton Park dialogue addressing mental health and psychosocial support. The needs of children affected by conflict in the middle east are enormous. Some children need safe spaces before they can even think about education. They have to get the trauma out of their minds before they can even start on education. Much of what we need to do is about education and trying to protect children so that, on their return, they can play a full part in society.

9.53 am

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I want to declare, as relevant items in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, that I went to Jordan with Oxfam in 2015 and made two visits with RESULTS UK, which supports the work of the all-party parliamentary group on global education for all, which I now chair.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) on securing the debate and on his powerful opening speech. It is also a great pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham). Both are active members of the International Development Committee, and they have raised important issues. I look forward to the response from the Minister and from the Labour Front Bench.

As I listened to the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire I reflected on visits that the Select Committee has made, and was struck by the opportunities we have had to meet children who have escaped from some of the worst conflicts in the world. In Uganda last year, we met Congolese children who were being educated in Kampala. They had escaped the appalling conflicts that have scarred the Democratic Republic of the Congo for many years. In 2015 I visited the Zaatari refugee camp with Oxfam, and met Syrian children traumatised by the experience of barrel bombs being used on the communities where they had grown up. They had to flee and all that they and their families wanted was the opportunity to go back to a peaceful Syria. Most recently, of course, the Committee last month visited Cox's Bazar—the hon. Lady told the story of the families we met when we were there.

I have also been reflecting on the experience of the predecessor Committee, when we went to Nigeria and met the amazing campaigners for girls who had been abducted by Boko Haram. One of the factors that we need to address when talking about children in conflict is the actions of armed groups such as Boko Haram,

as well as the actions of Governments. The hon. Member for Dundee West was right to remind us about the children of Yemen, the appalling consequences of the conflict there, the atrocities by all sides, and the impact on children growing up there.

As crises around the world become more complex and protracted, it is vital to use opportunities such as today's debate to restate the centrality of the protection of children to our development and foreign policies. As the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire said, schools wherever they are should surely be safe havens for children. Even when crisis strikes or even in conflict, children should not be denied the fundamental right to education, yet often schools are targets for attack by armed forces and groups. In some cases they are even turned into military bases or barracks. Even the presence of armed personnel close to a school puts children in the line of fire. There are countless examples from conflict zones around the world where that has happened. Of course there is an addition element—children's vulnerability to recruitment as soldiers or to sexual exploitation.

I welcome the fact that the Minister last week signed the safe schools declaration on behalf of the United Kingdom, making us the 74th country in the world to do so. I am pleased about that because I and others called for it to happen when we were here to debate the Select Committee's report on global education just before the Easter recess. The declaration is important. It commits Governments around the world not to use schools for military purposes, and to ensure that they are protected even during military operations. Now that the UK has signed it, we have an opportunity and responsibility to encourage as many other nations as possible to sign up. I hope the Minister will use her good offices to do so.

I want to state my appreciation for the efforts of the fantastic Send My Friend to School campaign, which has mobilised public opinion, particularly among children and young people in this country, on global education. In particular, it ran a high-profile campaign encouraging the UK to sign up to the safe schools declaration. As the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire said, it is a big challenge to ensure that the increasing number of children caught up in conflict situations, either internally displaced or living as refugees, get some sort of quality education.

More than half of the world's registered refugees of school age are not in school. Funding for education in humanitarian emergencies is not readily available, and less than 2% of global humanitarian funding goes towards education. When we visited Cox's Bazar, we saw the efforts being made to provide some sort of education, but essentially the child-friendly spaces in the camp provided two hours' education a day. That is clearly better than nothing but we need to aim for much better. It is perfectly understandable that humanitarian support in the form of food, water and shelter is given first priority, but surely we must not neglect the importance of investing in education for children who have been forced to flee their homes. What more will the Government do to work with the authorities in Bangladesh to ensure that the fleeing Rohingya refugees have access to quality education while they are displaced?

I reiterate some of the points the hon. Lady made about the Education Cannot Wait fund, which was launched in 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit. As she rightly said, the UK has played a leading role

and is the biggest single funder. It is a fund dedicated to education for children in emergencies and protracted crises. DFID has pledged £30 million already, but we know that, as conflicts become more protracted, it will be even more important to have funds such as Education Cannot Wait. I would welcome confirmation from the Minister today that the Government maintain that commitment.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency has long been regarded as one of the best multilateral organisations in the world. It operates in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the west bank, and provides services for more than 5 million registered Palestinian refugees and their descendants, who have been displaced since the 1940s. UNRWA has been hit recently by a decision by the Trump Administration in the United States to cut its funding.

Child protection is central to UNRWA's work. Given the volatile nature of the region, Palestinian refugee children have faced enormous challenges, including as a consequence of the conflict in Syria, the impact of the Israeli occupation and the blockade of Gaza, and simply the protracted nature of their displacement. Even faced with all those crises, UNRWA has come up with innovative ways in which to ensure that children caught up in them are protected and given an education. When the Select Committee visited Jordan and Lebanon, we visited an UNRWA school in Jordan, and were impressed by the quality of education provided for those Palestinian children.

In Syria, UNRWA has developed a series of self-learning materials for children in hard-to-reach or besieged areas who have been out of education for prolonged periods. A series of summer learning activities and catch-up classes is provided to students who have missed out on education, to help them to catch up with their peers. The agency also runs recreational spaces supervised by teaching staff and support counsellors, where refugee children can learn and engage in recreational activities, hopefully free from the threat of violence. In 2012, UNRWA launched its own education TV channel, broadcasting from Gaza and providing additional educational support to students and parents. It broadcasts English, maths, Arabic and science lessons to refugee children across the region, to ensure they do not miss out on learning the vital skills they need for their future.

I urge the Government, and the Minister if she has time in her response, to both reaffirm the UK's long-standing commitment to UNRWA, and say that we will work with other donors to ensure that funding cuts by the US do not hit the vital work it does.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should support moves from other multilateral education funders such as the Global Partnership for Education to look at funding non-state actors where they control particular regions, such as the Kurds in the northern region of Syria, so that they can access education funding for their children?

Stephen Twigg: That is an important point for both GPE and Education Cannot Wait. The agencies best placed to provide education in some of these emergency situations are often non-state actors. It is important that informal as well as formal education receives the necessary funding. Last week, I met with Alice Albright, the head of GPE, to discuss what more the organisation

can do to support Syrian refugees, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan, and Rohingya refugees. GPE is looking at those issues, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw our attention to them.

The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire touched on the important issue of sexual exploitation in the aid sector. I put on record again my tribute to her personally. She has been raising the issue for some time, well ahead of recent public and parliamentary interest. I remind colleagues that that follows damning reports of sexual misconduct by Oxfam aid workers in Haiti. As a result, our Select Committee is conducting an inquiry into sexual exploitation. In Haiti, aid workers exploited aid recipients after the earthquake in 2011. I thank *The Times*, in particular, and other journalists for shining a light on that appalling situation.

As the hon. Lady rightly reminded us, there have been long-standing concerns that some United Nations peacekeeping missions have failed the children they are meant to protect. In February, the UN revealed that it had registered 18 cases of sexual abuse and exploitation by its peacekeepers and civilian personnel in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some of those involved were minors, and we have had previous complaints about actions by UN staff in a number of countries, including from Senegal, Uruguay and South Africa. In those instances, people who were sent to protect children from crises tragically became the very people committing violence, adding to the crisis. If we are to protect children in future crises, surely we have to be able to trust the people who are meant to be there to provide that protection.

My final point is one that has already been touched on: the mental health impact of crises on children. Of course, when a crisis strikes, the first step of any humanitarian response is the basic services of food, water and shelter, but the psychological impact of those conflicts on children should not be overlooked. Without access to proper mental health and psychosocial support, there is a risk that children will develop greater problems later in life, and that their ability to rebuild their lives after conflict will be limited.

Last December, War Child published a report calling on the Government to commit a minimum of 1% of humanitarian funding to mental health services for children and their support networks. I ask the Minister to set out in her response what priority the Government place on the challenges of mental health and psychosocial support for children caught up in crises. Protecting all children caught up in conflict is important. That means protecting them from the threat of violence in whatever form it might take, including sexual violence, but also, in so far as we can, it must surely mean allowing children to live as normal a life as possible and preparing them for life after conflict.

That is why education is so central to this debate on the protection of children, and why the UK has such an important role to play not only in our bilateral work on education, but in the multilateral organisations such as Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education. The right to education surely does not end when a conflict begins. It is critical that children caught up in conflict are still provided with every opportunity to continue to learn.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. I want to call the three Front Benchers at 10.30 am, and we have three more speakers. If hon. Members could keep their contributions to not much above five minutes, then everyone will get the opportunity to speak.

10.8 am

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) for bringing this important issue to the Chamber's attention and for speaking so passionately on the subject.

Unfortunately, today's debate could not be more relevant, and it was pertinent that the hon. Gentleman brought to the attention of Members in the Chamber pictures that remind us of the impact that war, and living in a conflict zone, can have on young people and children. I am sure that all hon. Members here have witnessed the horrific pictures of injured children in the aftermath of the chemical attack in Douma only a few weeks ago. Seeing children gassed by their own leader is truly terrible, and I am glad that the United Kingdom, with her many allies, has spoken out against that and stood up to it. We must act to stop any further use of these despicable weapons, especially on civilian populations where vulnerable children will inevitably be victims.

That is evidently not the only area where children are affected by war. According to Save the Children, around one in six children live in conflict zones. Whether those children are recruited as soldiers, attacked in their schools or killed in their homes, the consequences of these conflicts are devastating.

I applaud the Department for International Development for doing all it can to alleviate the horrendous situations that children find themselves in, through no fault of their own. Committing 50% of aid to conflict zones shows the United Kingdom's dedication to this cause. That includes our £45 million of support to the United Nations children's fund in Syria, to help with humanitarian assistance in the wake of the civil war, as part of the wider £2.4 billion aid package to Syria as a whole. We are also providing almost £40 million to places such as Vietnam to help to clear landmines, which can maim or even kill children many years after a conflict has passed.

The funding provided by DFID for education, vaccinations and democracy in many countries around the world also helps to reduce the possibility of conflict; as countries grow their economies, they produce healthier, more peaceful and more prosperous nations. I am very proud to support the Government's commitment to spending 0.7% of gross national income on aid, and we should all be proud that the United Kingdom—alongside only six other countries in the world—achieves that target. The long-term continuation of that funding will help to eradicate more diseases, empower more women and, importantly, ensure that those who are caught up in conflict, including children, are protected from the horrors of war.

I conclude by again congratulating the hon. Member for Dundee West on raising this important issue. I hope that we can all work together, on a cross-party basis, to ensure that more children in every part of the world can grow up in a safe environment.

10.11 am

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to contribute to the debate, although, like probably every Member here, I wish it was not necessary. I am also delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) secured the debate. It is timely, as we have heard, given international events and the February 2018 Save the Children report, "The War on Children".

We have heard throughout the debate that the sad fact is that children pay the heaviest price for war, but they bear no responsibility for causing it. They may survive conflict, but their innocence is murdered. War robs them of their sense of themselves, their homes and, too often, their parents. It is an indictment of mankind as a species that the number of children living in conflict zones has increased by more than 75% from the early 1990s, when it was around 200 million. It is now more than 357 million—around one in six of the world's child population. Some 165 million of those children are engulfed in high-intensity conflicts, where there is often no access to schools or health facilities, and where they are much more exposed to violence.

The middle east is where children are most likely to live in a conflict zone. In 2016, about two in five children in the region lived within 50 km of a conflict event in their own country. Africa, where one in five children are affected by conflict, is second in this grotesque league table. Children are more at risk of conflict now than at any other time in the last 20 years. Research shows that the trends are very clear: there has been an escalation in the number of UN-verified cases of killing and maiming children, with an increase of nearly 300% since 2010. Incidents involving denial of humanitarian access have risen fifteenfold in the same period, and there has been a growing trend of abductions, because war opens the door to, and invites in, the chaos in which such licence thrives.

We also have to accept that increasingly brutal tactics are used: the use of children as mere weapons of war—as suicide bombers—and the targeting of, or the launching of weapons from, schools and hospitals. We in this Chamber are extremely lucky that we can only speculate; we cannot even really begin to imagine what effect living in such conditions has on children. A culture of violence often breeds a culture of violence in the next generation, and peaceful societies become harder to build and rebuild as a result.

We need real and concrete international action to ensure that children's lives and safety are protected. Save the Children has called on the United Kingdom Government to use all the influence at their disposal to improve measures that protect children and to ensure that there is a greater focus on explosive weapons in populated areas. It also calls on them to bring in measures to address the challenges surrounding that; those measures include the provision of training and support to the forces of other states, the establishment of a cross-Government framework to track civilian harm and ensure the comprehensive recording of civilian casualties, and the consistent championing of independent accountability mechanisms at the UN and other forums, including investigations into potential grave violations of children's rights.

The UK Government should seek to show leadership in delivering humanitarian assistance, working with allies to prevent the long-term damage of armed conflict. Responding to the psychosocial challenges of childhood trauma in conflict and toxic stress is extremely important. There is an opportunity here, and there ought to be the political will, to drive forward global action and investment in children's mental and psychosocial health, thus helping to reverse the long-term damage that will be done to a generation of children.

The earlier point from the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) about the UK Government's absolute duty to fulfil, in full, the terms of the Dubs agreement was well made. The UK's endorsement of the safe schools declaration is, of course, to be welcomed. As the lead in the global partnership to end violence against children initiative, the UK must use and prioritise aid to protect and champion children, to protect them against violence and recruitment into the worst forms of child labour.

Children do not create wars; they, more than any other group, are victims of war. The UK Government and the international community must take note and act. It is time to do all that can be done to end this murdering of innocence.

10.16 am

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): It is very nice to see you in the Chair, Sir David. It is great that the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), who is actually a good man and a friend, brought the debate. Well done, you. [*Interruption.*] I am not allowed to say you. Well done to him.

As the hon. Member for Dundee West said, about one in six children on earth have the bad luck to live in conflict areas. We should thank our lucky stars that our children are safe from war. However, we have a duty to try to reduce the threat to the lives of nearly 17% of the world's children. They can be active participants in conflicts—as soldiers or suicide bombers, for instance—but in the main it is their bad luck to have been born and brought up in the wrong place. The problem is compounded because more and more conflicts and armies operate more and more among the people, in villages, towns and cities, where the majority of children live.

The problem is getting worse. According to the United Nations, in its report from the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, 10,068 children were verified as being killed or maimed in 2016. In 2003-04, that figure was 3,223. Those are just the incidents that we know about. That is a 300% increase in kids being killed or maimed in conflicts around the world. We can clearly see from those figures that the situation is getting worse.

It is their innocence and lack of knowledge that puts children even more at risk than adults in conflict areas. Let me use an instance from my own experience. In 1993 in Gornji Vakuf, central Bosnia, a soldier from my battalion, which was working for the United Nations peacekeeping force, was on patrol when he saw a child pick up what the soldier thought was a bomb. He could not speak the boy's language, but he moved close to him and gestured to him to put the thing down gently. Instead, the child threw it to the ground. There was an explosion. My soldier was hit in the head by a ball bearing from the device, but luckily he survived.

Thank goodness the child was unhurt. The point of the story is that the child had no idea of the danger that he faced when he saw something attractive lying on the floor, and of course armies sometimes use attractive things such as flashlights to make people pick them up.

Save the Children is calling for greater investment in training for military forces on child protection. I must admit that I never had any myself when I was a soldier, but honestly, protecting children should come automatically to anyone, soldier or not. I presume that the training for which Save the Children is asking would include measures such as not using schools as bases, not firing near schools and playgrounds, and ensuring that weapons and explosives are not used near children, but for goodness' sake, is that not obvious to normal, decent people? I do accept that sometimes it is very difficult when soldiers are in the middle of a battle and children are nearby.

It is not just in far-flung places that children are used in conflicts. To my knowledge, from seven tours in Northern Ireland, several attacks were carried out by the Provisional IRA in which a terrorist gunman opened fire on our soldiers and then, at a pre-arranged signal, children were encouraged to come between our soldiers and the gunmen. I am proud to say that, in such cases, our men immediately stopped firing, but of course that encourages unscrupulous terrorists to use the tactic again—because it works.

Personally, I was educated on my responsibilities to children in conflict by one simple comment when I was the UN commander in Bosnia. An International Committee of the Red Cross delegate asked me to take responsibility for a six-year-old Bosnian girl and look after her in the house where I was quartered. She told me that the girl had been woken up very early in the morning—at about 5.30, I think—on 16 April 1993. Her mother and father had told her to dress quickly and come downstairs with her brother. She did that, and her mother and father and she and her brother were then taken out by soldiers and laid on the grass, face down. As the girl said, there was a lot of noise and her mummy, daddy and brother did not get up. The man who was going to kill her could not do so, and she was thrown into a prison camp.

When the ICRC delegate asked me to take in the girl, I was surprised and immediately replied, "No, I can't! I'm the British UN commander; I've got enough on my plate without taking children into my house." Her tart, barbed response was to ask me what the hell I was doing there if I could not do such a thing. She said, "What's the point of having soldiers here if you can't help a little girl to live?" I felt ashamed and I had no choice but to agree, albeit reluctantly. I did not know how I was going to do this or where it would lead and I was extremely concerned. I could not see how I would square it with the Ministry of Defence that I would have a child living in my house.

The girl, whose name was Melissa Mekis, was brought to me by the ICRC delegate the next day. I could not quite believe that I was taking possession of a six-year-old kid. She was filthy dirty, blonde-haired, blue-eyed—a Muslim girl, as it happened, not that it mattered what her religion was. She was left with me and my soldiers. My so-called bodyguards boiled up a billycan, filled a bath and bathed her. They went and found fresh children's clothes from Save the Children's house nearby, and they fed her, particularly with sweets. Clearly, they pampered

[Bob Stewart]

her as much as they could. They made up a bed for her between their own two camp beds and checked on her all the time.

After a few days, the ICRC delegate who had brought Melissa to us located her uncle in Novi Travnik and came to take her away and reunite her with her real family. She did not want to leave my two sappy bodyguards, whom by then she adored, but of course it happened. I gather that Melissa Mekis eventually went to the United States, where she married and she has two children.

The moral of the story is that wherever we are and whatever we are, we should all take responsibility for trying to protect the one in six of the world's children who suffer because of conflict. That includes us in this place.

10.27 am

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My goodness, how can I possibly follow that account? I thank the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). As always when I hear him speak, in any debate, he contributes something from his own experience that sets us all thinking about our own responsibilities and what more we can do in the world. I thank him for sharing that story, and I thank him and his bodyguards very much for taking that responsibility. We have to wonder what would have happened to Melissa without that and where she would have gone. They at the very least gave her somewhere she felt safe, which was a hugely important thing to do. If the MOD got the hon. Gentleman into trouble for it, it certainly should not have, because he did absolutely the right thing, and we should all express our appreciation.

Robert Owen said that

“no infant has the power of deciding at what period of time or in what part of the world he shall come into existence”.

That is true, because no child would want to be born in a conflict zone or grow up in one, but those are the circumstances in which so many children find themselves—it is one in six of the world's children and, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) said, disproportionately those in the middle east and Africa. The brilliant briefing by Save the Children gives us food for thought on what more we can do in that respect.

All hon. Members have said strongly and passionately that the first thing that we should try to do is to protect education for children, because that is the foundation on which all other things will be built for the future, for the children individually, for their communities and for their countries. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran and the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) highlighted, if we do not protect children's education, that will breed further violence. There will be a cycle of violence that the country will not be able to break out of. The responsibilities that we hold as a significant player in the international community and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council should therefore include, in as many circumstances as possible, ensuring that the protection of education becomes a priority in all those different areas. That is the basis on which the countries will be able to get themselves back on their feet once the conflicts hopefully conclude.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) mentioned the safe schools declaration, which seems like a hugely positive step in making places of education safe spaces where children can come together. I am glad that so many countries have signed up. We should use our pressure in the world to get other countries to come on board. I suggest we prioritise Saudi Arabia, which is not yet a signatory.

I do not mention Saudi Arabia and Yemen lightly, because as we saw with the attack on a wedding this week, it is a huge problem. We have responsibility because we are selling arms to a country that is disproportionately targeting civilians in the attacks it carries out. The evidence is there to see in the picture that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) held up. It is also evident in projects such as the Yemen Data Project, which collects airstrike data for Yemen. The results do not make good reading. At least one third of Saudi airstrikes have hit civilian targets. Last month's data identified that a school had been targeted and hit, and that parks and residential areas have also been targeted. This should give us cause for concern as a nation. The Government are signing off on arms deals to a country that is not taking its responsibility for the safety of civilians in conflict seriously. We must cease these arms sales before more children are severely damaged and lose their lives forever.

The UN convention on the rights of the child is almost 30 years old, but this is clearly a time of increasing danger for children. Many hon. Members have mentioned that children are becoming part of the very mechanisms of war, and are targeted by state and non-state actors. It is a huge worry to us all not only that chemical weapons are coming back to countries such as Syria—as the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) said—but that children, whom we have always tried to protect in war, are becoming part of the target. We should be extremely worried about that and use our international influence to maintain international norms and standards. If children are becoming a routine part of conflict and the target of weapons, the fabric of international society and conventions is fundamentally damaged. We must be very afraid of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West movingly showed us four photographs, which stick in our minds and resonate. I went recently to an exhibition of photographs by Antonio Olmos and Young Lens Syria at Anderston Kelvingrove church in my constituency—they showed the journey of Syrian refugees from their home countries to Europe. It strikes me that families in conflicts make decisions, not choices—there really is no choice in such situations. They want to keep their family and children together if they can, and keep their children safe by all means possible. It has often been said that people will not put their child on a boat in the sea unless it is more dangerous than staying on land. That is the non-choice and the decision that families make every single day. We will continue to see that until their countries are safe.

We must also bear in mind our responsibilities when those children reach Europe and the UK. Organisations I have spoken to in my constituency have taken in child refugees who are on their own, and tried to support them and give them the counselling that we can perhaps better offer than their home countries—we have the professional expertise and the counsellors who can do

that. There is barely any counsellor in some countries, never mind one for all the children who need one. What those organisations cannot offer, but the Government can, is certainty for those young people. They do not know how long they will be here, whether they have a future here, or whether or when they will be sent back to a country where they feel unsafe, and where they might have seen their families killed, as the hon. Member for Beckenham mentioned. We must do all we can to ensure that the young people that we as a country take into our care feel safe, that they do not feel that they cannot put down roots here, so that they can start to heal from their traumatic experiences. If they cannot do that, they will not be able to fully engage with the services that are trying to help them and will continue to feel unsafe.

I thank everybody who has spoken in the debate and look forward to hearing what the Minister will do. We have a responsibility to children all around the world. They are not somebody else's children. They are the world's children—they are our children. We must do all that we would do for our own children to ensure that they stay safe and get all the rights that we expect for our own.

10.35 am

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) on securing this debate. It is clear that in his official capacity on the Front Bench he takes these issues seriously, but I know that he has a real personal passion for all these important development topics, especially the rights of children.

We have heard some excellent contributions, not least from the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham). I realise that we will be in this Chamber many more times over the coming years, which is a delight. My constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), is Chair of the Select Committee on International Development. I know how much time and energy he puts in every day on these really important topics. He reminded us today that the fundamental rights of children need to be put front and centre in all of our debates in this area.

My hon. Friend mentioned UNRWA. I had the privilege of travelling to the West Bank and seeing some of the work that UNRWA does over there. I believe that more than half its employees are teachers working with children and young people across that region. It is so important, as the Minister has said in the past, that if there is any negative impact from the announcement from the Trump Administration, we look at how the UK can lead the way in securing additional resources from all our partners. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) really illuminated what this looks like on the ground. I want to give him my appreciation for telling us that story of his real lived experience.

We must remember that as we debate, children are being abducted to fight in wars. They are being trained to use weapons. They are being abused and targeted as deliberately victims of war. As we heard, protecting education and schools needs to be one of the main priorities for the UK Government and all global institutions. Today we have heard a number of alarming statistics, and we could continue simply to exchange them for the rest of this debate. The most alarming is that one sixth

of all children in the world are affected by conflict. Heaven knows that these statistics are deeply shocking, but they do not alone do justice to what we are talking about today.

I want to begin by telling James's story. James lives in South Sudan, a country that was born out of decades of bitter conflict to become the world's newest independent state in 2011. Tragically, South Sudan has been plunged into bitter internal conflict in the years since. James's happy family life in a small village with his mum, dad, brothers and sisters was disrupted when he was only 13 years old. James tells his story:

"I was betrayed by my own brother, who forced 15 of us from the same village to become boy soldiers. It was a very hard life and there was so much suffering.

I saw soldiers abusing civilians—I saw them with guns, powerful guns—I knew then that we could be powerful like them if we had guns. One day we received an order that we had to march from Unity State; it was a terrible ordeal.

We marched without food and water, in a terrible heat. I watched some of my colleagues die of hunger and exhaustion.

Later I was shot in the shoulder, and I hid in the bush. It took a month for me to recover. I hid and eventually I found a school that took me in.

But after 7 years as a boy soldier, I then found out that my mother and father had passed away."

James's story is typical of South Sudan, and of the conflict zones that girdle the globe. Since 2003, well over 12,000 children have been recruited on both sides of the conflict inside South Sudan. Untypically, perhaps, James's story is now a happy one. Eventually, he trained as a United Nations child protection officer and 15 years on, he uses his experience to help others who, like him, have been caught up in conflict that is not of their making.

Virginia Gamba, the UN special representative for children and armed conflict, presents an annual report on children and armed conflict to the UN Secretary-General each autumn, as the world gathers for the UN General Assembly in New York. Last year, she told a handful of journalists at a press briefing:

"The tragic fate of child victims of conflict cannot and must not leave us unmoved; a child killed, recruited as a soldier, injured in an attack or prevented from going to school due to a conflict is already one too many".

It was not the fault of Ms Gamba or the few journalists gathered that attention was largely focused elsewhere—when disturbing and uncomfortable facts are presented, it usually is.

Ms Gamba's report referred to children from countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. In the 20 countries covered by her report, at least 4,000 verified violations were committed by Government forces and more than 11,500 verified violations were committed by non-state armed groups.

We look to the United Nations, UNICEF, the International Red Cross and others to provide leadership in forcing global leaders to act, and we commend UK charities and non-governmental organisations—such as Save the Children, World Vision UK and War Child—that continue to make the unarguable case for action. It is important to support their calls to increase investment in education for children in conflict areas and in improved mental health opportunities for children who are living through major conflict or where conflict has ended.

[Dan Carden]

I also commend the work of Gordon Brown, UN special envoy for global education and former Prime Minister, for all the work that he has put into the safe schools initiative, which has helped to bring about the safe schools declaration. I congratulate the Minister and the Government on its signing last week.

Bob Stewart: From the other side of the House, I pay tribute to Gordon Brown's work, which is largely unsung—as, indeed, are so many things that he has done. I really appreciate and commend him for the work he has done since he left Parliament.

Dan Carden: I thank the hon. Gentleman and associate myself with his comments.

Britain has a continuing and strong role to play as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a leading member of the Commonwealth and a member of NATO. We have put our global influence to good use by being at the forefront of initiatives to combat sexual violence in conflict and to ban the use of landmines and cluster bombs. Will the Minister commit to updating the Government's civilian protection strategy to ensure that those and other explosive weapons are explicitly avoided, that their impact is mitigated and that when we train foreign forces, we ensure that explosive weapons do not contribute to the deaths of civilians and children?

Let us not fool ourselves: some of the Government's other actions go completely against the commitment we share in this debate to protect civilians and children. On Monday, the BBC reported that 20 people, mainly women and children at a wedding, were killed in an air strike in northern Yemen, as has been mentioned.

According to the United Nations, Yemen is a now a failed state. Let us be absolutely clear that the so-called Saudi-led coalition, which the Government continue to arm heavily, is responsible for the lion's share of the death and destruction. How can we arm the Saudis with one hand and provide humanitarian aid to the suffering Yemenis with the other? Where is the sense and where are the ethics?

In the last week, my hon. Friends and I have twice, without receiving a clear response, asked Ministers from the Department in the Chamber why, if the Government are concerned about children in Yemen, they did not insist on full and permanent humanitarian access in Yemen and on an immediate end to the bombing of civilian areas before they signed what is, I am afraid, a disgraceful new £100 million aid partnership with Saudi Arabia last month. That partnership whitewashes that country's reputation but does nothing to protect children in Yemen. I hope the Minister will answer that question.

UN Special Representative Virginia Gamba said:

"If you have no justice, there is no law, there is no order, there is no fair deal and there is no fair play."

Those words should ring in our ears, because our country has an ability and a special responsibility to behave in a consistent manner to champion an international rules-based system. To achieve that, we need a foreign policy based on human rights and social justice, and for that, it is increasingly clear that we need a Labour Government.

10.45 am

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) on securing the debate. I recognise the important and passionately argued personal contributions made by my hon. Friends the Members for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham), for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) and for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), and the hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden).

The protection of children in conflict situations is clearly close to many of our hearts. I was struck by the way in which the hon. Member for Dundee West used pictures. As politicians in Westminster Hall, we have to rely on words and try to match the power of those pictures with them. In preparing for the debate, I was struck most powerfully by the shocking statistic that in the last six years, more non-state armed groups have been created than in the previous 60 years. That brings home the scale of the issue that we are dealing with as a world.

The numbers bear repeating. A staggering 246 million children are living in countries affected by armed conflict, 61 million children are missing out on part of their basic education, and millions more are migrating in the hope of a better life, risking violence and exploitation along the way. Clearly, those children deserve our attention and protection if they are to reach their full potential.

We have heard about the gravity of living in conflict or crises for children. It is harrowing to hear those individual and collective stories about losing the opportunity for education, being separated from loved ones, being forced into marriage or slavery, suffering from the worst forms of child labour, being trafficked across borders or, increasingly, recruited into armed groups. As hon. Members rightly pointed out, the effects are not just physical, but mental. The trauma and distress caused during times of conflict can endure for a lifetime—well after the conflict has ended—and need appropriate help.

The UK Government are not sitting on the sidelines, but showing leadership in protecting the worst affected people. We have heard many allusions to that. I reiterate that the UK's aid strategy commits 50% of our aid to fragile states and regions. In such places, protecting children is a policy priority.

In the time allowed, I will highlight three themes of the debate: our provision of education to children in crises; our work to reform the humanitarian system; and our protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation, including modern slavery.

First, the need to get children back into school came up throughout the debate. During a conflict situation, it is critical to support them, because it helps to regain a sense of normalcy above all and invests in their education and the human capital that will be needed post-conflict. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby asked specifically about the Education Cannot Wait initiative. The UK will continue to make multi-year investments in quality education in crisis contexts that prioritise child protection and support children's psychological and social wellbeing.

I am proud that the UK has been a leading supporter of quality education for children affected by the devastating crisis in Syria. We have played a key role in the “no lost generation” initiative. The UK has helped over 350,000 Syrian children to access formal education, and future support will reach a further 300,000 children.

In Uganda, we have reorientated our education support to ensure that we reach the children who have been displaced by conflict in South Sudan—an issue that was rightly highlighted by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton—as well as the communities that are hosting refugees around the world.

I am glad that hon. Members appreciate that the UK has just signed the safe schools declaration, underlining our important political support for the protection of schools during military operations and in armed conflict, and of course the UK will encourage other countries to endorse the declaration.

Secondly, our humanitarian reform policy, which was launched last October, demonstrates our continued commitment to reforming the humanitarian system to protect children in conflict. It reaffirms our commitment to international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law, and it states that protection should be at the centre of all humanitarian action. We call for all humanitarian agencies to put protection of civilians at the centre of their work and to ensure minimum standards for the protection of children. That includes the work that we have done since the situation with Oxfam in Haiti was revealed by *The Times*, and the leadership that the Department has shown in ensuring that all the organisations we work with have really robust safeguarding measures in place.

We also continue to support agencies that work specifically with children in conflicts. People have mentioned the important work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF, and how much of that work will be funded by UK aid. Questions were specifically asked about United Nations Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA—an unlovely acronym. I have said it before but I will repeat today that we are a firmly committed supporter of UNRWA, which provides vital services to refugees, and we are very concerned about the impact of reduced donor funding, particularly from the US, so we are working very closely with other partners on how best to ensure continuity of services.

Bob Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for giving way. I just wanted to highlight that she has not mentioned the International Committee of the Red Cross, which the British Government hugely support. The ICRC is always there—always there last, when everyone else pulls out, and normally there first in conflict areas. It does hugely good work and I just wanted to highlight that point.

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that absolutely remarkable organisation, which, as he said, enjoys considerable support from UK aid. It is trusted to reach places that other organisations cannot reach and it is seen as being impartial in so many different situations around the world. It is right to pay particular tribute to its work.

Hon. Members asked about the Dubs amendment. I want to highlight, because no one else has done so, the fact that the UK has already welcomed over 10,000 of

the most vulnerable refugees from Syria, nearly half of whom are children now making their lives in the UK, and that is well ahead of schedule in terms of the commitment that the UK Government made.

Another topic that came up was the Rohingya crisis. Clearly, we are working in that area through UNICEF to respond to the needs of unaccompanied children, including a provision of specialised protection assistance, which was rightly mentioned.

Syria was recently described by Save the Children as the most dangerous conflict-affected country for children. Of course the UK continues to be at the forefront of the response to the crisis there. In 2016-17, our funding in Syria provided access to education for over 430,000 children, and psychosocial support for nearly 3,000 children. In addition, hundreds of thousands of children were provided with food, water, relief packages, medical consultations, vaccinations and nutritional support, and Members will be aware that the Secretary of State for International Development is in Brussels today to announce our increased allocation for the coming year.

Thirdly, I will highlight the need in protracted crises to do more to help strengthen systems, in order to prevent children from falling through the cracks in the first place. I can highlight examples of the work that we are doing in Somalia, where we are helping children to have a legal identity, without which they are obviously at greater risk of family separation, trafficking and illegal adoption.

We are also a leading donor to the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children; indeed, the Secretary of State for International Development is on its board. We hope to see many fragile and conflict-affected countries commit with new vigour to ending violence against children.

In conclusion, the protection of children in conflicts and crises remains a top priority for the UK. We will continue to show global leadership on this issue. We will also continue to be flexible enough to respond to emerging threats in a changing world, going beyond delivering humanitarian assistance by building better systems and societies for children of the future. I again congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee West on securing this debate and I leave the last word to him.

10.56 am

Chris Law: I thank the Minister for her response, and for giving us assurances about what is being done and mentioning some pathways for the future. As outlined in this debate, there is a lot more that we can do if we are serious about protecting children in conflict.

I thank you, Sir David, for chairing this debate, and I thank each and every Member for their poignant and powerful speeches and contributions to it. In addition, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for his personal testimony about his time in Bosnia.

In many ways, this debate has been difficult to listen to. The atrocities committed against children during conflicts are so appalling that we need to confront them and we need to begin doing so now. The sheer scale—one in six children across this world live in conflict—can no longer be ignored. After listening to the debate, I hope that the Minister will take on board the unanimous view of hon. Members and go further. In doing so,

[Chris Law]

she will have our support and—I am sure—support from across the UK, to show how deeply we feel about what is happening to children in conflict and the urgency of the action that is required.

I will finish by mentioning an issue that has already been raised today by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), and it was also raised yesterday in an urgent question on Yemen. There have been over 17,000 targeted bombings in Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition, with one in three targeted at civilian targets. Our weapons are being sold to Saudi Arabia and used against those targets; our British military are involved in intelligence and service there. So, if we want to end the suffering of little children, the first step we should take is to halt arms sales now and end the atrocity that is happening in Yemen.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered protecting children in conflict areas.

Capital Needs of Co-operatives

11 am

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered capital needs of co-operatives.

It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. It is a particular delight to be able to talk co-operatives with the Treasury Minister twice in two days. For those of us who want the co-operative and mutual sector of our economy to double in size, fixing the difficulties that co-operatives have in accessing the capital they need to expand is critical. Co-operatives UK, the co-operative movement's trade body, has done an excellent job in recent years of championing community shares as one way for local co-operatives to raise significant but comparatively small amounts of capital to grow. Lottery money is currently being used by Co-ops UK's community share unit to support community shares offers, but more could be done if the Government renewed their previous interest in this area. It would be good for Ministers to explore what else they can do to encourage the further expansion of community shares.

More recently, Co-ops UK, working with retail co-op societies, has begun to explore whether fixed-term withdrawable share capital could be developed, allowing more established societies to raise patient and engaged equity finance from members and non-member investors, up to a £100,000 maximum individual shareholding limit. The Financial Conduct Authority does not always get a good press, but it has been very supportive of that work, and I hope the Minister will encourage the FCA and Co-ops UK to continue to champion that new potential source of capital for many co-operatives. The chief executive of Co-ops UK, Ed Mayo, deserves praise for his skill in getting this work so far down the road.

Other parts of the co-operatives and mutuals sector of our economy—notably building societies, friendly societies and mutual insurers—have been subject to legislative changes permitting them to raise much larger amounts of additional capital. These reforms are yet to apply to the co-operative world.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene—I sought his permission to do so beforehand. Does he agree that co-operatives should be allowed to invest in social housing? It is the very essence of what a co-operative seeks to do. Benefits are involved. I gently suggest that the Minister should consider revisiting the ability of co-ops to invest capital funds directly in social housing.

Gareth Thomas: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point. If he can use his not inconsiderable influence on the Minister to support what I will say, we might be able to accelerate the addressing of some of the problems co-ops face in investing in social housing. Unless co-operatives can raise additional capital, they cannot expand or develop to their true potential. At worst, they are at risk of demutualisation, as I will set out. Co-operatives do not issue shares in the same way as investor-owned companies—to do so would mean demutualising—so bigger co-operatives can face considerable difficulties

raising additional capital at the level they need. Their growth inevitably is limited and their ability to compete on equal terms is reduced.

In short, legislation is needed to fix this problem—legislation that protects that unique governance model of co-operatives, but allows them to issue permanent investment shares. Such shares could allow consumer co-ops to grow by acquisition and by developing new business offers for their customer members. Football supporter-owned clubs could fund the development of new stadium facilities, grow their businesses, serve their communities and consolidate their income streams. Co-operative-owned energy generators could attract long-term investment to build even more energy infrastructure of the sort we need in this country. A lack of capital limits a co-operative's growth and ability to develop new services. The growth rate of that co-operative is constrained by its relative inability to add significant capital through retained earnings.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): In my constituency, the Headingley Development Trust is doing its second community share offer. It has already managed to raise £232,395 from individuals—I declare an interest as an investor in that share scheme. That money is being matched by £100,000 from the community shares booster programme from Co-ops UK, Locality and Power to Change. The trust can have only £100,000 because of the cap. Energy, community facilities and social care can all be aided by lifting the cap.

Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend raises a good example of the difficulties that co-operatives face. I pay tribute to his work championing the co-operative he mentioned. He also underlined my point about the good work that Co-ops UK has done in championing community shares. His fundamental point is absolutely spot on: there is a limit to the amount of capital that co-operatives can raise because they do not have the instruments available to them that are available to many of the non-co-operative businesses that operate in our economy.

Like all businesses, co-operatives need to be able to benefit from the economies of scale that are often available only by growing their businesses. They need to gather sufficient capital to serve their members well, to extend services to new members and to expand their services. Without new capital, many co-operatives could be driven into inappropriate corporate forms through demutualisation. Many of us in the co-operative movement can think of many examples where that has already happened. If co-operatives convert to other corporate forms, consumer choice in our economy is reduced and large numbers of consumers would no longer have non-listed, member-owned options in the marketplace. That reduces competitive pressure from the operation of different business models in the same market and adds to systemic risk to the economy.

There is inevitably a limit to the amount of debt that can or should be raised by any business. Mutual shares would present an opportunity for small mutuals to raise funds that they may not be able to raise otherwise, and for larger co-operatives to raise funds that subordinated debt does not provide.

Additional capital helps in a number of ways. It could be used in tactical acquisitions, which would help businesses' competitiveness. They could also look at

local infrastructure development potential. There are a number of examples overseas of similar co-operative share offerings. Examples from Canada, the Netherlands and across the European Union show how mutuals can enlist their members in raising capital through the issue of new deferred shares. In summary, the benefits offered provide evidence that Government support for such a Bill would create a viable new opportunity for mutuals to attract new capital and deliver positive outcomes for mutuals and consumers.

Currently, co-operatives largely have to generate capital for growth internally. They have no shares to sell and hence no access to equity markets. Ongoing capital in co-operatives consists of retained earnings and bank borrowing, with some smaller co-ops also raising withdrawable share capital. The lack of access to reliable capital can be a serious limiting factor on the growth and development of consumer mutuals. How these businesses are constructed means that the introduction of external capital without additional safeguards, such as limits on voting rights and distributions, would water down the mutual purpose of the organisation. The International Co-operative Alliance said that co-operative capital needs to offer

"a financial proposition which provides a return, but without destroying co-operative identity; and which enables people to access their funds when they need them. It also means exploring wider options for access to capital outside traditional membership, but without compromising on member control".

Consolidation between mutual businesses has been the short-term response to pressure in the past. That has created a small number of firms of critical size that are better able to compete in their markets. Without access to new capital, however, organic growth has remained a difficult challenge. In staying true to their business purpose, customer mutuals are therefore limited by their options to access capital for growth. Some external capital instruments do exist in mutuals. In building societies, more than a billion pounds of deferred shares have been issued. Nationwide building society and Cambridge building society have issued core capital deferred shares. That new capital instrument is designed for mutual building societies and enables them to raise common equity tier 1 capital to supplement retained earnings and diversify their capital base.

The Government supported legislation for mutual insurers and friendly societies to issue deferred shares in 2015, although I note that the restrictive position of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has prevented its full implementation and the relevant orders from being laid before the House. It would be good hear whether the Minister can unlock that particular blockage.

The mechanisms for funding co-operatives are more restricted than those for companies. It is not possible for co-operatives to have equity share capital, as understood in the company law context, because equity ownership is incompatible with the co-operative principles and would therefore be *prima facie* unregistrable. It is also not possible for societies for the benefit of the community because distributions of income and capital are not permitted.

Co-op societies, like building societies, were historically funded by their member customers, who were required to subscribe a minimum amount of share capital in order to be afforded full membership rights. That might be built up over a period of time, including by leaving

[Gareth Thomas]

undrawn dividends. Subject to the minimum capital requirements, therefore, members were permitted to withdraw funds from their account, and share capital was typically withdrawable. One of the consequences of that was that members' share capital remained static in value. Although it was risk capital in the sense that it could be lost on insolvency in paying debts owed to creditors, it did not give members an undivided share in the value of the underlying business.

While the co-operative carried on trading, members therefore had no expectation of any entitlement to more than the repayment of their original capital. Their real interest was in the continuity of the existence of their society, providing goods and services to meet their needs. As a direct result of that approach to funding and ownership, any undistributed surplus was retained as reserves and shown as such in the accounts, and although such reserves constituted members' funds for accounting purposes while the society remained a going concern, they did not belong in a traditional ownership sense to the members. They were more like assets currently being held by the body of members, almost as trustees for the purposes of the society.

An appropriate and sustainable basis of funding is a prerequisite for any business if it is to start up and survive, and the requirements for funding are likely to change or evolve over the life of the business. The restrictions in relation to the funding of co-operatives, which are created by legislation, are therefore fundamental to the future use of the co-operative form, and to the future viability of co-operatives.

I do not expect the Minister to give a guarantee of support today for the new form of investment capital for co-operatives, but I hope he will take time to reflect. Although I appreciate he has committed to meet me on another issue, perhaps he will be willing to meet me with Mutuo, the think-tank in the co-operative world, which has been developing this instrument, and which supported Lord Naseby when he introduced similar measures in 2015 which, as I said, are currently held up as a result of the unfortunate attitude of HMRC.

Another new type of raising capital that I want to put on the table comes from Italy. Worker co-operatives can play a significant part in rejuvenating firms that would otherwise close in places where there is a supportive policy and business infrastructure to facilitate that. It can act as an essential component of a progressive employment policy. Perhaps the best example of this is the so-called Marcora law from Italy, where conversions take place as negotiated employee buy-outs between workers, the exiting owners, the co-operative sector, the nearby local authorities, and bankruptcy courts. Under a legal framework—the Marcora law—an infrastructure of support has been created to assist the worker buy-out of firms. State funding that would otherwise be spent on unemployment benefits is used to finance the new co-operatives. It has been remarkably efficient for the Italian taxpayer. It is estimated that that investment has safeguarded nearly 14,000 jobs in 270 businesses and generated an economic return for the Italian state of almost seven times the capital invested.

The Italian method of creating staff buy-outs is essentially a negotiated conversion and business restructuring mechanism, with a unique set of supportive

policies and a financing structure facilitated by a collaborative approach between staff, the co-op sector and the Government. Some resources are provided by the Italian state Treasury. Again, I do not expect the Minister to commit to this measure today, but in due course it would be good to hear his reflections on that example.

Perhaps on another occasion it would be good hear what further steps the Minister will take to try to encourage the expansion of the credit union sector, where capital remains a significant issue. The lack of resources for marketing is probably one of the biggest things holding back that sector's development.

11.15 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David—for the first time, I believe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) on securing this debate today. I am grateful to him for giving advance notice of the topics that he has brought before the House, which has given me an opportunity to consult my officials. Although I do not anticipate that we will get to final conclusions that will fully satisfy him today, I am very happy to have a meaningful dialogue with him in the Treasury with officials and Mutuo, the think-tank that he mentioned. I acknowledge his long-standing commitment to co-ops as chair of the Co-operative party and chair of the all-party group for mutuals. I take what he has said very seriously.

We have heard today how much the mutuals sector is valued in this country, and we share that enthusiasm in Government. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman, alongside other voices in the sector, proposes the introduction of a new financial instrument that co-operatives could use to raise capital. I also recognise that co-operatives need to be able to raise capital quickly and efficiently, and I appreciate the need for flexibility in capital planning.

The hon. Gentleman knows, as a distinguished former Minister himself, that any new policy needs to be thought through and to receive due consultation, not as a wilful delay but to ensure that it is right. I will ask my officials to explore the proposal further, including through discussion with representatives of the sector. I will gratefully receive any further information that he can provide me with.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised the issue of allowing co-operatives to invest in social housing, and I thank him for that suggestion. Again, I do not have an answer now, but I will be happy to discuss that with officials and to liaise with him over the outcome. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) asked about the £100,000 cap on share capital and its potentially being lifted. In 2014 the cap was lifted from £20,000 to £100,000. We will keep that under review, but I acknowledge what he said and we will continue to examine that.

I turn to the mutuals' deferred shares, which the hon. Member for Harrow West mentioned. The Government recognise the benefits of mutual insurers to consumers and the economy. That is why they supported the passage of the Mutuals' Deferred Shares Bill, which was originally introduced as a private Member's Bill in 2015. The Treasury consulted on the technical details of MDS in late 2016. We received representations from a variety of

mutual insurers, consultants, and industry groups. It emerged from the consultation and follow-on work that the industry sought to issue MDS that, first, qualified as top-tier capital under relevant prudential regulation, and, secondly, had no ill effect on the tailored taxation regime that applies to mutual insurers. Since the consultation, my officials have been working closely with HMRC and the regulators to investigate whether it is possible to structure MDS to satisfy both requirements. Throughout that process, officials have sought the views of industry and its representatives via correspondence and roundtable meetings.

It has become clear that, if a mutual insurer issues equity that qualifies as top-tier capital, it will breach at least one of the principles of mutuality, found in case law, affecting mutual insurers' tax treatment. Amending primary legislation to ensure that that did not occur would not be straightforward, and could have many unintended and undesirable consequences. For instance, any proposed exemption could give rise to legal risks in the form of state aid. I am happy to get into the detail of that in conversation with the hon. Member for Harrow West. I am considering the available options, but clearly there is no simple solution. I was drawn to ask officials why this matter did not become apparent during the passage of the Bill. Probably it was because the Bill was passed quickly in the early part of 2015, and the issue did not arise.

I now want to exhaustively examine the issues raised. The hon. Gentleman suggested that the Marcora law would assist worker buy-out of failing firms. I thank him for making me aware of that policy, which sounds worthy of further consideration. Job losses caused by firm failure can have a devastating impact on communities, particularly when those employers account for a high concentration and number of employees in a single community. I would be interested in learning more from the Italian example about how converting to a co-operative structure can avoid job losses while saving taxpayers money.

I would also be keen to see evidence on the implications for productivity. Clearly, a short-term fix that does not address some of the fundamental challenges that exist in a business is something that one would wish to examine. Again, I will ask my officials—they will be very busy—to discuss that with representatives of the co-operative sector in order to understand whether that model could be used in the UK, if not in that precise form then in one derived from the concept.

We must not forget that the Government have shown a demonstrable commitment to supporting the sector, because we are acutely aware of its significance. There are nearly 7,000 co-operatives in Britain today that, together, contribute more than £36 billion to the UK economy. Recognising the value of co-operatives, in February we introduced a measure to bring audit requirements for small properties in line with those for small companies. Properties have a key role to play in social investment. Last year, the Government expanded the social investment tax relief scheme, which provides a tax break to encourage investment in social enterprises for certain co-operative investors. That expansion will allow social enterprises to receive investment of up to £1.5 million under the tax relief, which is a substantial increase from the previous limit.

The Government see the great value in the mutual sector and the contribution it makes to not only our economy, but our communities. That is why we have taken steps to support all mutual structures, from co-operatives to credit unions. Today's discussion has been fruitful, and I will look to have further such conversations. I thank the hon. Member for Harrow West for his long-standing commitment to co-operatives, and the constructive way in which he has brought this matter to my attention. As a Minister, I am very conscious that one's time in office can be very short. If there is anything I can do to move this agenda forward, I give him my commitment that I will do so.

Question put and agreed to.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Transport for the South East

[SIR HENRY BELLINGHAM *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Transport for the South East.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry, and to see colleagues from across the political divide from the south-east here to contribute to the debate.

Last year, I hosted a parliamentary reception for a new, emerging subnational transport body, Transport for the South East. Strategic transport investment is integral to growing our economy and parliamentarians should support bodies such as Transport for the South East, to allow them to secure and direct the investment needed to grow our regional economy. I called this debate to demonstrate our collective support for the aims and objectives of Transport for the South East.

Let me describe the transport challenges and opportunities for those living within the south-east region. It is home to 7.5 million people, a figure that will grow by 16% over the next 25 years. That accounts for 12% of the UK population and 13% of the workforce. At £200 billion per annum, our region is the second-highest contributor to the economy after London. The amount of public spending per head in the south-east is, at £8,100, the lowest in the UK—10% lower than the national average and 20% lower than London.

Despite carrying the bulk of rail passengers, the public subsidy per passenger mile on Southern and Southeastern railways is in the region of 5p to 7p, versus Northern Rail's 25p. Unlike London, we do not have an efficient mass transportation system, so 70% of those in employment travel to work mainly by car, which is similar to the UK's other regions outside London. Despite that, spending per head on local roads and local public transport is lower in the south-east than in any other English region outside London.

As the gateway between the rest of the UK and mainland Europe, we are fortunate in having some of the major transport assets within our region. Dover and Southampton ports power the UK's European and global export market. Gatwick carries the world's busiest and most efficient runway. Heathrow, on our border, is the second busiest airport in the world. We have a high-speed railway link to the continent and more commuters journeying to London by rail than any other region.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Huw Merriman: I was just about to mention the Dartford crossing, so I will of course give way.

Gareth Johnson: That is very good timing—perhaps I should have let my hon. Friend continue. As he mentioned High Speed 1, does he agree that the Elizabeth line—the Crossrail system—which is very much to be welcomed, is nevertheless unsatisfactory because it falls 10 miles short of High Speed 1 at Abbey Wood? There is a gap

of 10 miles that prevents commuters going from Windsor and the west of London right through to Brussels, Paris and so on, which would enormously help the transport network in the south-east.

Huw Merriman: My hon. Friend has a similar issue about High Speed 1 to the one I have about Ashford. We believe there is a real economic case for links towards Hastings and Bexhill. I am absolutely sure that his economic case and the case for expanding on current plans will be heard.

I was about to reference the Dartford crossing, and the challenges and opportunities delivered by 50 million vehicles per year travelling across the River Thames.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing today's debate. Does he agree that we have incredible infrastructure and transport hubs? I would add Newhaven port to the list he gave. Outside London, the south-east economy needs those infrastructure hubs to add up to more than the sum of their parts. If we are to exploit fully the economies of Slough and Brighton—I struggle to add Bexhill and Eastbourne to that list—getting people to and from them is incredibly important. We need to get that right so that the south-east economy outside of London does not remain dependent on just London.

Huw Merriman: Despite our political differences, I work very closely with the hon. Gentleman, who comes from further across the coast in Hove, and whose constituents experience many similar challenges to those of my constituents. He is absolutely right. A body such as Transport for the South East gives us that opportunity. Although it is always tempting for us to focus on our individual constituencies, which we must, the reality is that the sum of the parts is going to be much better at delivering what we need as our constituents travel from one part of the south-east to the other. He is right, and I hope this debate will move us on.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): On the Dartford crossing, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the concerns of the residents of Gravesend, and in particular of those in Northfleet and Gravesend, should be taken into consideration before the scheme is finalised by the Government?

Huw Merriman: With any major transport project, that is absolutely essential if we are to have good will. A crossing such as that is incredibly exciting because it will alleviate the existing pinch point and make us more productive, but of course we need to carry the local population with us, particularly as it is the locals who are impacted—many who travel will not necessarily be from the local area.

It is a coincidence that I took interventions from two Opposition Members as I was about to talk about Government intervention and thank them for significant investment schemes in the south-east transport network. In this road investment period, Highways England will invest £2 billion into roads in the south-east. The equivalent funding period for Network Rail will see £3 billion invested in the Southern and Southeastern rail network, which has some of the oldest rail infrastructure in the UK despite carrying the most passengers. Although we

have challenges to overcome, and although we lobby for a funding share commensurate to our output, we are getting more funding overall because the Government are spending more on transport. The key is to ensure we get the projects the region needs. That is where Transport for the South East comes in to play.

Established in June last year, Transport for the South East is the shadow subnational transport body representing 16 local transport authorities and five local enterprise partnerships, which speak with a single voice about strategic transport priorities for the south-east. Its primary aim is to support and grow the economy in the south-east by identifying and prioritising a programme of integrated strategic transport interventions. It also aims to improve the experience of the travelling public and businesses and bring about more reliable journeys, free of congestion, while safeguarding the environment.

Although I am tempted to raise my own local transport issues in this debate today—I encourage others not to hold back—and lobby for schemes within my 200 square miles of constituency, I believe that there is more chance of securing success in my constituency and those of colleagues if we all work together to establish one body, with one voice, that works effectively across the south-east region to address the biggest problems in our strategic infrastructure network. By getting behind the work of the body—it is under the chairmanship of Councillor Keith Glazier and the leadership of the region's local authority and local enterprise partnership representatives—we can secure the best strategic transport to support the outcomes we want for our region: new housing without increased congestion, improved connectivity and access to the best employment opportunities for our residents.

The south-east's population has substantially grown in recent years. Businesses are drawn to a great place to do business and individuals are drawn by high levels of employment. That has driven growth in the south-east's economy of 25% since 1997, which has generated substantial tax revenue for the country. There is, however, a cost to this success. Our transport infrastructure is facing the challenges of population and economic growth and we risk the future delivery of an economy of huge strategic importance to the UK if action is not taken. That is why Transport for the South East is vital for our future prosperity.

At the same time, TfSE knows that it must not forget those pockets of the region that have not experienced the same economic success and are not as prosperous as other parts. Our coastal communities in particular—many hon. Members represent those communities—have large populations, high unemployment and low productivity. That is due in part to poor connectivity, and in part the further and higher education facilities in those deprived areas of employment. The transport network has a key role to play in improving access to skills and employment and creating new opportunities for the residents of those areas so that they, too, can lead prosperous lives. The challenges extend beyond the administrative and political boundaries. They require the new body to join up transport policy, regulation and investment, and give clear strategic investment priorities to improve connectivity across our region.

To move forward, Transport for the South East needs to do three things: develop a transport strategy, secure statutory status and secure additional funding from

the Government. Considerable funds have been awarded to Transport for the North, which has received £50 million, and Midlands Connect, which has received £17 million, to help them take forward their work programme over the next few years. The subscriptions that Transport for the South East is currently raising from its constituent authorities will amount to only £500,000 in the next year. We must congratulate the local authorities that raised that cash. They have taken the initiative and come together despite their own funding pressures because they recognise the importance of working as one. However, more funding is badly needed, not least because the Transport for the South East infrastructure has a significant bearing on the performance of the wider UK economy. Securing statutory status is critical in ensuring that Transport for the South East becomes a formal legal entity and a formal partner of the Government, Network Rail and Highways England, with the ability to influence their investment programmes. Without that status, it will not have the influence we need it to have.

This substantial, resource-intensive process will require additional funding support from the Government if it is to be completed in a timely manner. Work on the main transport strategy is due to commence in the summer, but the pace of its development is dependent on central support of the kind enjoyed by Transport for the North and Midlands Connect.

To conclude—I want to give other hon. Members the opportunity to raise issues in their localities—the south-east economy is already delivering for the country, and has greater economic potential if we allow it to come through. Awarding Transport for the South East statutory status would give us the opportunity to identify and prioritise a package of strategic transport improvements, which will benefit not just the south-east but the entire UK economy. With Government support, Transport for the South East will be able to move at pace to statutory status and, more importantly, complete its transport strategy, which will determine the transport investment we get in the south-east.

Strategic transport investment will give not just the south-east but the country as a whole the opportunity to prosper. I look forward to working with colleagues and Transport for the South East as a new body as it drives these new opportunities. I hope the Minister will signal in his response his encouragement for the quest we are following.

2.42 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) for securing this very important debate, especially after the very successful launch of Transport for the South East, which we attended last October.

This is a well-timed opportunity to talk about the western rail link to Heathrow, as next week a new all-party group to support the case for and the delivery of the scheme will have its inaugural meeting. As co-chair of the western rail link to Heathrow stakeholder steering group, along with the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), I want to take this opportunity to invite all hon. Members to join the APPG. The group consists of representatives from Network Rail, Thames Valley Berkshire local enterprise partnership, Slough Borough Council, Heathrow Express, Heathrow Airport Holdings Ltd, Great Western Railway, British Airways

[Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi]

and the Department for Transport. Its aim is to promote and support the delivery of a direct rail link between Slough and Heathrow before 2024.

A western rail link to Heathrow would enable passengers throughout the west to travel to the airport without travelling into London. It would mean faster, more reliable and convenient journeys for passengers, with travel times expected to be about 26 minutes from Reading and only six minutes from my Slough constituency. It would provide a step change in rail accessibility at Europe's busiest airport, open up new markets across the Thames valley, Wales and the south-west, and relieve congestion at London Paddington.

A link coming in from the west, through Reading and Slough and on to Heathrow, would mean four direct trains every hour each way between Slough and the airport. According to Network Rail statistics, that short link of less than four miles would generate more than £800 million of economic activity and 42,000 new jobs across various regions.

In addition to the obvious convenience and benefits to the economy, there are potentially huge benefits for our environment. The carbon dioxide savings from the modal shift from cars to rail would equate to approximately 30 million road miles a year through a reduction in road congestion. Some 20% of the UK's population could access the airport via just one interchange; there would be no need to go into London and back out. The scheme is beneficial to areas of the south-east, even if they never use it. The areas of the south-east that stand to benefit most from the direct link are Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

It would be remiss of me not to point out what an opportunity the link would present for passengers in Bristol, the midlands and beyond, including the south-west and Wales. All that from a four-mile rail link, most of which is tunnelled, with no obvious planning, land ownership or technical obstacles to overcome. There has been a very favourable response to Network Rail's public consultation exercises thus far.

Given that the Government committed to the rail link in 2012, I hope the Minister will extend his support to it today and assure us that it will finally be built without delay. I very much hope he joins us next week at the inaugural meeting of the APPG on the western rail link to Heathrow. Simultaneously, I ask that he reassures us about the promised timetable to deliver Crossrail—the Elizabeth line—by the end of 2019 to ensure that residents and users in Burnham, Slough and Langley will benefit and that those stations will be fully operational.

2.47 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on securing this important debate.

Transport infrastructure is a core component in the functioning of a modern society. Transport has the power to guide our decisions about where to live, study and work. If it is done well, it can transform and regenerate villages, towns and cities, increase workforce productivity and facilitate the operation of industry, which in turn attracts other industries and services. If it is done badly, we have the flip side of the coin.

The south-east of England is the most populated part of the country and a powerhouse of economic activity. It contributes more than any other region outside London to the national economy. Consequently, we are home to some of the busiest roads and railways in the country, and that is further compounded by historical underinvestment and a lack of foresight in planning decisions.

Evidence of capacity limitations on road and rail networks is becoming increasingly stark. As an MP, I hear about it on a weekly basis. Just yesterday, a constituent who works in Chichester told me that she regularly sits in traffic for an hour each way on the A27 to and from work, even though in normal conditions the journey, door to door, should be about half an hour.

There are similar concerns about the railways. Govia—the company that manages Southern, which operates much throughout my constituency—announced in November last year that complaints from the previous year were up by well over 200%. Of course, that was exacerbated by strike action.

Peter Kyle: The hon. Lady is making a really great speech, and I am enjoying listening to it. The Minister will know that every MP in this Chamber joined together in the all-party group on Southern Rail. We called on the Government last year to release £300 million, which Network Rail told us was the most it could spend on infrastructure upgrades in our area. To their credit, the Government released that money, for which MPs from both sides of the House are very grateful. Will the hon. Lady join me in endorsing the Gibb recommendation for that £300 million to be released for the next three years, after which we can deliver transformation on the line?

Gillian Keegan: I agree, of course. As a fellow member of the APPG on Southern Rail, I agree with its recommendations.

In the south-east, high economic activity is good news for our area, but that does not tell the whole story. Many coastal and rural communities miss out on the wider region's success. In part, social and economic exclusion can be attributed to the design of the transport network, and our system is designed in an "all roads lead to London" pattern, like spokes from a wheel. Only two key routes cross my region from east to west: the M25 to the north and the A27 along the coast.

The A27 is therefore a highly congested road, exacerbated by pinch points where traffic builds in Chichester, Arundel and Worthing, to name but a few. The effects are wide-reaching, pushing more traffic on to local residential roads, worsening air quality and impacting on business supply chains moving goods in and out of the area or, indeed, from the ports or the coast. Such is the issue along the south coast that much east-west traffic will go from the south coast up to the M25 and come back down on major trunk roads such as the M3—all to avoid the A27.

The rail network is formed in a similar pattern. All trains run into hubs. The Windmill Bridge junction at East Croydon, for example, can have a paralysing effect on the network. Routes across the south-east and London funnel into that single junction and, put simply, the sheer volume of traffic has long exceeded the capacity of the junction. Consequently, a delay on one line delays the next, creating a domino effect of delays across the region, with people sitting on a train and not

at their place of work. The effect on productivity could be mitigated, at least, if we had some degree of adequate wi-fi connectivity on the trains.

The Coast to Capital LEP hit the nail on the head when it described the travel network in the south-east as congested, overcrowded and inefficient. The problems we as an area face are clear, but so are the opportunities for locally driven strategic transport infrastructure improvements to link up networks, to support businesses and attract them to our area. I therefore fully support the formation of Transport for the South East as a statutory sub-national transport body. That would be a positive step to meet the needs of our area.

Transport for the South East brings together representatives of the area who have an inherent understanding of local needs and concerns. They can inform any process from the start. That is crucial when we consider impacts on our protected landscapes, for example, such as the South Downs national park that reaches across the heart of region, so I am glad the South Downs national authority is represented on the TfSE board to give a voice to our protected landscapes.

Other local advantages can come into play, such as planning decisions. TfSE comprises representatives from 16 local authorities that understand national, regional and local priorities such as housing provision, business development, tackling unemployment, social care services, energy supply, global economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability. Those can all be fed into the process to deliver smart and sustainable growth.

Working with a collective voice has advantages. As an area, we have common transport issues, such as the Windmill Bridge junction that I mentioned earlier or the lack of an east-west road infrastructure. A single regional voice will be much more impactful than people working as individuals.

I am glad that TfSE is already talking about improving travel technology as part of our infrastructure investments, such as electronic ticketing and—another much-needed tech enhancement—the provision of effective wi-fi to all trains and stations. That is crucial in an area such as Chichester, where we have a poor signal—never mind 4G—or across the South Downs. Wi-fi could be transformational for commuters and productivity, and TfSE could do just that. Similar programmes, such as Transport for the North, have already been successful.

The World Economic Forum's global competitiveness index shows that the UK is behind many of its major western European trading partners on transport infrastructure. The south-east is home to international businesses and industries that use our airports, seaports, roads and railways. By bringing together 16 local authorities and five local enterprise partnerships, we shall have better integration of transport modes across our region to create a transport system that runs smoothly, improving services for all users.

I fully support Transport for the South East, and I hope that we secure statutory status for it soon so that it can become a formal partner of the Government, Network Rail and Highways England. In doing so, we shall be able to address the significant issues in our area, bringing together communities and providers to form a truly integrated network. Strategic transport planning and improvement has the potential to bring with it talent, investment and opportunity for the entire south-east region and beyond.

2.55 pm

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Sir Henry.

I thank the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) for securing this important debate. I also appreciated the words of the previous speakers. This is an important debate, and one of the things that I was thinking about as Members were talking was that, as we all know, the south-east is one of the most prosperous parts of the country, and yet for decades the transport infrastructure in parts of Sussex and Kent has been absolutely atrocious. It has never really been any good.

A wee while ago someone of the same persuasion as Government Members put a theory to me, saying, "Well, Stephen, you have to appreciate that all those years ago in Sussex and Kent there were a lot of ex-colonial officers, colonels and senior civil servants who had moved to Bexhill, Eastbourne and other parts. The last thing they wanted was good transport, because they would get all the hoi polloi down there"—his quote, not mine, I stress. I drew myself up to my full height, only to say, "You're probably right." It is bizarre, however, and Eastbourne is a case in point. My colleague the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), whom I know well, is well aware that he has a speedy train from Brighton to London and the M23, but from Eastbourne I am constantly struggling with Southern Rail and the A27.

The point about this debate, however, and about Transport for the South East, which I am keen to support, is that the only way we can move forward productively is to join together and pool our resources, and do so on a cross-party basis. A lot of the business chambers and local councils are involved. I am delighted that the chairman of Transport for the South East—I was going to say this anyway, but I see him in the Public Gallery—is a colleague of mine, the leader of East Sussex County Council, which I usually spend my time attacking these days because of the cuts. I am absolutely delighted that Councillor Keith Glazier is the chair.

We have had a number of discussions, but from the purely selfish perspective of East Sussex, having the leader of the county council right in the middle is very important. Bluntly, over the years East Sussex has for one reason or another lost out a lot on transport infrastructure in many areas. It is good to welcome Councillor Glazier, although I think he has two letters from me on their way to him right now, as usual.

The two key issues are rail and road. Obviously, Southern has problems that have been going on for a long time, albeit I would like to think that it has been getting better over the past few months. More than that, specific rail transport infrastructure matters need to be put on the table, which I am happy to do. I have been reminded that rail infrastructure generates £5 billion in gross value added per annum for south-east England, provides more than 81,000 jobs and brings in almost £1.5 billion in tax. More specifically, in Eastbourne alone the rail network brings in £47.2 million per annum and provides directly and indirectly 750 jobs. Rail is crucial.

I recognise that Sussex has infrastructure challenges—it has had them for a long time—but we also have challenges on how much space we have to put down new tracks. What I would do to have a fast train zip from Eastbourne

[Stephen Lloyd]

to London in an hour! It would make such a transformational difference, but I appreciate that there are challenges. None of that detracts from the infrastructure benefits that rail brings to my town, East Sussex, Kent and beyond. Those benefits are vital to the south-east.

Peter Kyle: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point about the importance of the link between the coastal towns and London. However, does he agree that we have learned in recent years that the coastal towns between the cities on the south coast have not benefited from the economic renaissance and prosperity of recent decades in the same way as places such as Brighton and Chichester, and other towns and cities in the region? That is why we need investment in the coastal route and much smarter travel between the coastal towns. We need to make the economies of the cities far more accessible, rather than being dependent on London all the time.

Stephen Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. One of the most depressing things imaginable is to drive around this country and stop at every single coastal town—for one reason or another, a lot of them are suffering desperately and have been for a long time. I am enormously proud of how Eastbourne has bucked that trend, certainly in the last 10 years. We will be opening a new transformed shopping centre, with £85 million of private money—my God, I had to have an awful lot of meetings to be part of making that happen.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point that poor transport links between the coastal towns and cities makes it three times harder to try to turn them around. I do not want to name any particular coastal towns that have suffered, because that is invidious—I know how hard it is to turn a coastal town around once it goes over a tipping point—but without improving infrastructure between those towns, turning them around will be impossible. We can pour as much money in as we would like, but unless we can find a way to get people to come to the towns and spend money, they will keep going in an ever-deteriorating circle. I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point.

There are very specific inconsistencies in rail funding. I believe the Department for Transport is looking at them, but I would like to reiterate them. I pay tribute to the Rail Industry Association for providing this briefing, because it is very important. It states, as we know:

“The Government provides funding for the rail network in five year timespans known as control periods. At the end of these control periods there is often a drop off in funding before it ramps up again at the start of the next control period. This means the supply chain for rail goes through periods of boom and bust, making it very hard for business to plan”—

particularly SMEs, which are involved from a subcontracting perspective. The briefing also states:

“It also increases the cost of...the rail network by up to 30%.”

The hon. Member for Hove alluded to the Department's generosity in boosting the funding to Network Rail to improve the infrastructure in the near past. I support him very much in the hope that the Government will continue in that direction of travel over the next few years. I believe they will—I am hearing good soundings and would be very supportive.

Believe it or not, I try very hard in most debates to stay away from the subject of Brexit, because it does not half go on a bit, but it is important. One of the realities of Brexit, according to RIA figures, is that anywhere between 20% and 45% of the skilled staff of Network Rail and related ancillaries are of EU origin. We need to ensure that, over the next year—whatever my personal views are, we leave the EU next year—the Government do everything they can.

Mr Dhesi: The hon. Gentleman mentioned both Brexit and Kent. The M20 in Kent very often becomes a lorry park. Does he agree that, in their Brexit dealings, the Government need to ensure that the M20 does not become a permanent lorry park?

Stephen Lloyd: When the hon. Gentleman mentioned Brexit and Kent, I thought he was going to announce the independence of Kent, but clearly not. He makes an important point. The Government have put a lot of effort into that—they face specific local residential problems in various areas and are looking to extend transport and parking facilities. I am glad the Department for Transport has to sort the problem, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it has to be resolved. Clearly, it is likely to get worse from March 2019.

On the jobs front, if 20% to 45% of staff are EU nationals, that has to be absolute priority for the Government. We were talking coastal towns earlier. Somewhere between 60% and 70% of staff in the catering and hospitality area are EU nationals. We are on a journey, which I appreciate is supported and was voted for in the referendum, but I hope the Government are watching closely for the complexities coming down the track such as jobs in the rail network.

I have spoken a lot about the importance of rail. I make no apologies for that, because I have always believed that it is a crucial game-changer for my town. The usual trains take an hour and 25 minutes to an hour and 30 minutes. If I could get that down to an hour and 10, it would make life so much easier to keep Eastbourne growing in the positive and prosperous manner for which I have worked so hard for so many years. I look forward to the chairman of Transport for the South East, Councillor Keith Glazier, working with me, together with all of us, to keep the pressure on Govia Thameslink Railway and Southern rail to ensure that they keep improving. It is absolutely vital that the industrial issues and dreadful problems we had for one reason or another for 18 months or two years on the line from Eastbourne to London and back, and on other parts of the network, do not reoccur. I will be working on and watching that very closely.

When the hon. Member for Hove drives from Eastbourne to Folkestone as the crow flies, it is only about 70 miles but takes about three and a half hours. It is absolutely ridiculous. The coastal connections around that part of the country are absurd—there is no other word for it. Going across Romney Marsh, I half expect to see some of the old smugglers from 200 years ago. It is ridiculous and needs to be fixed. It would transform a lot of the coastal towns that have seen terribly difficult times for the last 30 or 40 years. It is the sort of thing that would be a game-changer and I would be very supportive.

My *bête noire* is the A27, as we know—I wrote to the Minister only 10 days ago. I am aware that East Sussex County Council has put a lot of thought into it.

Colleagues and various businesses are putting together a strong business case for the Department, which I know has been looked at. The Minister knows very well my views and how supportive I would be of a solution, which probably means a new spur that would be a dualling of Lewes and Polegate. I will be happy to do anything I can do to encourage that.

I again thank the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle for securing this important debate. Given the problems we have had for decades with transport in the south-east, it is amazing that we have done as well as we have. So much of the infrastructure is rickety. This new body is very positive step. I wholly appreciate that it covers and includes a whole range of people, experts, political parties and business groups. I have no hesitation in supporting it and hope and pray that it will be the catalyst for making a significant difference, which we all know the south-east needs, over the next five to 10 years.

3.9 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is an honour to speak under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on securing this important debate.

Transport plays a crucial role in the development of a strong economy. That is what I argued on 22 March when I delivered a speech in the other Chamber of this House during an equally important debate on the economy, which I am pleased to say continues to defy the naysayers, and I was one of them. In that speech I urged the Government to make some use of the expected Brexit dividend by spending some of it on the roads and rails going to Clacton—I have moved our argument slightly north of Bexhill.

It is interesting to note that connectivity along the coast is not something we could do in my area because we have these damned great rivers, so I am going along the lines of being one of the spokes on the bicycle wheel when we talk about Clacton. As a regular commuter myself, I know that it takes far too long for my constituents to travel from Clacton to the capital, and vice versa. We are that spoke.

Without more investment in transport infrastructure around Clacton, we will limit the incentive for people to move to and commute from our glorious sunshine coast. That would harm the economic potential of my district and would restrain the prosperity of hard-working local residents: an outcome that is not acceptable to me or my residents. That is why I have continued to push for what I call my 70 in 60 campaign at every opportunity, which has the ultimate aim of ensuring that the people of Clacton are able to cover the 70 miles—that is all it is—to London in 60 minutes. That is not unthinkable. It is not even illegal.

Currently the journey of 70 miles takes one hour and 40 minutes nearly, and it takes longer than it did in the days of steam, which, unfortunately, I remember—or fortunately; depends how you look at it. If we get that journey time down to about an hour it would in my opinion regenerate our area, and it would make our sunshine coast a place for people to come, live, work and play. I am here today to plug that campaign once again, because my constituency has so much to offer, not only as a tourist destination, but as a place to live, and it has real untapped economic potential. When it

comes to unlocking that potential, I know, as someone with extensive experience of supporting businesses in my district—I was the cabinet member for regeneration at Tendring District Council—that important investment in infrastructure is a crucial first step, so I am pleased to say that we will soon have new rolling stock with wireless internet and USB ports. The trains will be comfortable and modern and they are beginning to be delivered this year.

The new trains will stop and start with greater efficiency. They will be quicker, but not quick enough, which is why, although I celebrate the positive development of the new trains, I maintain that much more must be done because, without more significant investment in our transport infrastructure, commuters simply will not believe that Clacton is a place they can live and work from, as the journey times to London are currently so unfavourable. I have been meeting regularly with Network Rail, Greater Anglia, and the Great Eastern Main Line Taskforce to raise my concerns and support their efforts to improve the current appalling situation.

Additionally, as the Minister will probably know to his cost, I continue to make representations to his Department for Transport at every opportunity. I thank him for his support and I am encouraged by the Government's shrewd approach to transport investment.

I do, of course, recognise that the core issue is that places such as Colchester are growing and have an increasingly young and more economically active population. Consequently, they are seen as more vital for transport investment than some of the older communities and coastal communities such as Clacton that have for far too long been neglected. However, although the demographics are set against us, I am determined to keep going and find a way forward. We cannot fall into a cycle of neglect where our older communities are left isolated—I speak as one of them because I became a pensioner a few weeks ago—[HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] Thank you for that. Our older communities are left isolated in favour of areas that have younger residents and new development. We want to attract younger residents, and if we do not take steps now to invest more in improving Clacton's transport infrastructure, we cannot hope to attract that younger economically active population at any point in the future.

I accept that we have not built enough homes in Clacton. That might be another reason why young commuters do not wish to call my constituency their home, so I would support sustainable housing developments in my local area, because we must do our part to help address the national housing crisis. That is not only vital for people in Clacton, but for the entire south-east region. However, the Government must do their part, too, and we must improve our transport infrastructure before any new major housing developments break ground. We simply cannot build more dwellings without first making it easy for people to occupy and live in them, and investing more in transport would do that.

Furthermore, such investment will address the concerns of current residents, who just this weekend told me they have worries about the new developments because of congestion on their roads and railways. That is why the Government should focus on infrastructure investment before delivering new homes. We need the I before E approach: infrastructure before major expansion.

[Giles Watling]

By following that approach in the south-east, we can deliver quick transport to London and to major regional hubs such as Colchester, Ipswich and Chelmsford and further to the north in Norwich. By doing so, we can deliver the homes we desperately need, the transport we require and the economic opportunities that are currently just out of reach. With that in mind, there are various opportunities across the south-east that I would like the Minister to look at.

One of the projects includes Stansted airport, which I heard today has the most efficient runway in the south-east. It is already a vital transport hub, but that hub needs to be able to continue to expand, and in the next few years the right decisions need to be made to help the airport reach its economic potential. According to projections, that will deliver an additional 15,000 jobs by 2030, with a £1 billion boost to our region's growth. I ask the Minister to do all he can to support that project as I know there are those who live in my constituency who work there, but it is still quite a long a commute.

It will come as no surprise to the Minister to hear me ask him to support the upgrade of the A120. He knows how passionate I am about that campaign, and I was pleased to read in his recent letter to me that the A120 scheme is in a strong position moving toward the decision making process for the second road investment strategy. Delivering an improved A120 would open the doors to a renaissance in house building in the south-east and connectivity to Stansted. For any hon. Members who agree with me, I will be hosting a reception on 17 July to move the campaign over the line, so please come along.

There are jobs to be created and homes to be built in areas just like Clacton if we invest in and improve the roads and rails to such areas in the south-east, which we have neglected in the past. For people in Clacton there is the world of entertainment, enterprise and revelry to be had in London if we improve the ability to access it for people in some of our less well-connected areas. I will always argue that the transport investment strategy should focus on delivering locally to unlock the economic potential of communities such as Clacton: regionally, on projects to improve connectivity between our economic hubs; and of course nationally to rebalance our economy. The implications of such a decision for our economy, transport in the south-east and our country are in my view only positive, and I back the body for transport in the south-east.

3.17 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Sir Henry. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on what has been an incredibly constructive debate this afternoon. He was absolutely right to set the tone and say that transport should be about serving our wider economy. It plays an important role.

We find ourselves yet again debating transport across the south-east, which has been a regular theme in my role as the shadow Minister for Transport. It is significant because we know that 9.2 million people live across the south-east region and investment is therefore really important, which we must get right as we move forward.

As the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) said, this matter is not only about the economy. It is about housing and infrastructure and making sure that we get a wider connectivity, and we must recognise the importance of that.

Transport infrastructure requires a strategic approach, not least because of its significance to London, but also because far better orbital routes are needed to rebalance the London focus back into the region to develop wider regional economic opportunities. My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) made the point about how investment in transport is crucial if we are to see the revitalisation of our coastal towns. Across the ports in the south-east there is currently concern, however, as the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) said, about the customs arrangements that could well operate in a post-Brexit environment. The ports provide a vital gateway to the British economy. They are a major employer in the region and support millions of passengers each year. Business is dependent on the pace by which freight flows through the ports and moves onto its onward journey. Customs equivalence is therefore essential, and the whole industry is nervous about the Government narrative, and the contemplation of less favourable terms.

The technology that the Prime Minister has raised to address a bad deal does not currently exist, so it would be years before technology could undertake the task required. With her hard Brexit approach, there is a risk that ever more lorries will stack up on local and main roads or, more likely, that they will not come at all. The roads infrastructure cannot cope as things are now, but that would be a challenge too far. The road freight infrastructure deficit and the lack of lorry parks were exacerbated by the latest fiasco of not following process and having to scrap the lorry park plans at Stanford West. Local people's calls for the Government to get things sorted out have been ignored. Operation Stack needs decisions to be taken now, and actions to be expedited.

The rail network always dominates the debate, and its fragmentation creates barriers not only between the London and south-east footprints, but within the south-east, which has hosted a plethora of rail operators over time. The lack of capacity is straining the infrastructure, but the Government have been too slow in managing the avoidable mismanagement of the services, not least on Govia Thameslink Railway. We are nine months on from the publication of the Gibb report, whose importance has been mentioned in the debate. It is important for the Minister to update the House on progress that the Government have made with the recommendations in the report.

We have heard how fragmentation, and the issues with Southern across the network, have been a distraction from the provision of what I would call basic passenger services, including wi-fi, which, as the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) said, is essential for increasing productivity.

Peter Kyle: My hon. Friend's speech about the region's transport challenges is a tour de force, and I am grateful. The hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) made the point incredibly well about the lack of wi-fi, and some of the technological advances that we are missing, but it is worth pointing out that most trains running

from Hove to Chichester do not even have toilets on them. They are class 313 trains, which were mostly built in 1976, before most of the Members present were even born. Does my hon. Friend agree that in addition to the technological advances that have been mentioned we need to get really good rolling stock, so that people who work on the trains, as well as passengers, can from time to time use a toilet?

Rachael Maskell: I could not put that better than my hon. Friend has done. Toilets on trains are a public health issue as much as anything, and we need to make sure that the transport system can provide all passengers with the basics. That would be Labour's focus on the transport system—seeing it as a service to the public, and therefore ensuring that the infrastructure is in place.

I want to discuss devolution, because it is important that decisions can be taken as close as possible to the communities that they affect, so that local expertise can be invested into the transport system. Westminster currently has far too much power, and the level of centralisation of decision making by the Secretary of State for Transport and his Department is unbelievably constraining. It also ignores local advocacy. We must see devolution as about moving powers and resources from Westminster to the regions. We do not want new bodies to become talking shops; we want them to have power to make a difference to their communities. Transport for the North was recently established, and it has powers of strategy setting and advocacy but still has to go cap in hand to the Secretary of State.

Earlier this week I raised concerns about the inequality in decision making between Scotland and Wales. The country is becoming a patchwork of entirely different powers, and some areas have no voice at all. It is a mosaic of chaos and confusion, leaving all frustrated. I advocate redress and with a Labour Government the public will be confident in how strategic planning will be embedded across the transport system, giving devolution a strong place across the country, with no one left behind, and equality as things move forward.

That brings me back to transport in the south-east. I welcome Councillor Keith Glazier to the Public Gallery. I was reading some statements made by Councillor Tony Page, who also sits on the shadow board of Transport for the South East, which was launched last month, in which he highlighted why the region was plunged into chaos after the Government scrapped the former regional transport board in 2010, and set out the regional and strategic focus that is needed. I realise that the Secretary of State is now trying to make up for lost time. However, I must emphasise the slowness of the pace of reinstatement of the board. More could be done to bring it forward from 2020 to 2019, and I urge the Minister to do that and make sure that the process does not continue to be so protracted. The blueprints for regional boards are already out there, and I want the Minister to put more emphasis on bringing things forward. There is cross-party support for doing it by 2019. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about that.

Since I have been in post, I have listened to numerous debates, questions and MPs' concerns about the need to future-proof the south-east's transport infrastructure and investment. I recognise the inequality that has grown across the nation with regard to transport spend,

and it is vital to redress that, for the sake of the economy and communities of the north, but it is no secret that the south-east's infrastructure is creaking and that at times things have almost ground to a halt for passengers and freight on roads and rail. The region hosts the UK's most significant airports, and yet connectivity between them is poor, and air pollution from ground access alone is poisoning communities. Those are urgent matters, and there has to be a regional approach to them now.

We just seem to move from one underwhelming environmental piece of the Heathrow expansion plan to the next. It has, to date, failed to address the serious environmental standards that are demanded. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) is right to press the Minister about the importance of the western link into Heathrow—just four miles of track to improve air quality significantly and bring about modal shift back on to the railways.

Labour cannot stress enough the urgency of improved infrastructure links to the many important coastal ports, and the fact that rail and road connections to most of them are nearing full capacity, if they have not reached that point already. Without the use of strategic regional intelligence to future-proof the transport system, the country will continue to stumble forward to the next hurdle. Devolution is also urgently needed to drive a sustainable transport system in the south-east. The heavily congested road and rail networks demand a completely different approach. Seventy-one per cent. of people currently commute by road. We need a modal shift away from car reliance and its environmental consequences. The Government have spent a lot of time in court defending the indefensible with respect to the nation's poor air quality. Instead, they should bring the focus of a strategic vision for the transport system.

As is, sadly, often the case, buses have not yet been mentioned in the debate. Nevertheless, a strategic bus plan in the region is important, and I wish to ask the Minister what investment his Government are putting into the next generation of sustainable buses. We hear much about cars, including the significant investment in electric cars, but that will not solve the issue of congestion because there will still be an equivalent volume of vehicles in the south-east, and the roads cannot cope with that. Many journeys carried out by car could, as an alternative, take place by bus, and bus tech is really important for the future. We must invest in R and D in bus tech, and I would be interested to hear the Government's plans on that and their focus on our bus network.

Labour has focused on buses in recent weeks. We will offer all those under 25 free bus travel where there is municipal ownership—rightly putting buses back under the control of local authorities to provide a public service, rather than allowing bus companies to cherry-pick the most profitable routes. In a region with the highest age demographic, that point will not be lost.

Mr Dhesi: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government must fully support the work of Slough Borough Council, which is trying desperately to ensure that bus services continue in the area? A current operator has decided that certain routes will no longer be operational, but the council needs support from the Government. As yet, that support has not been forthcoming. Does she agree that the Government need to step in and support local councils?

Rachael Maskell: It is crucial that local authorities such as Slough Borough Council have control over bus routes. Buses are servants of the community and must determine how best to service the wider needs of that community. Quite simply, bus operators put other interests such as the profits they make above the service they provide. We must ensure that people again have confidence in their bus service. We have seen how successful that has been here in the capital, where a real investment has been made, and we are clear that local authorities must again have that control over the bus system.

Finally, I wish to mention the promotion of active travel across the region. Cycling and walking have not featured in today's debate, but they should be the transport mode of choice, particularly for short journeys. Sadly, however, the car is often seen as the most convenient way to travel because of the barriers that have been put in people's way. What does the Minister plan for the south-east regarding the promotion of cycling and walking? To date, I believe that the Government's plans have not been ambitious enough to see a modal shift or a real embrace of the cycling and walking agenda.

In conclusion, it is vital to have a far more strategic approach to transport planning across the south-east to ensure that resources are in the right place, as well as a longer-term vision. As we have heard, start-stop control periods do not give authorities enough time for substantial planning. We must advance our transport system, because it is imperative that we rebuild our economy and build a sustainable environment for the future, whether for freight or for passengers.

3.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): May I say what an adornment you are, Sir Henry, to the Chair in Westminster Hall, and may I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on securing this debate on the important issue of the sub-national transport body, Transport for the South East? As with everything else, my hon. Friend has been a vigorous, energetic and, if I may say so, effective campaigner. Indeed, as he gently reminded the House, this is the latest stage of his campaign to put this institution on the parliamentary map, and I salute him for that. In his speech he gave an excellent summary of the opportunities and challenges facing the region. This debate is timely given the run-up to the launch of the economic connectivity review for Transport for the South East on 8 May, which I understand will be a key milestone in its work towards developing a transport strategy for the region as a whole.

I will come in due course to the many constituency issues raised, but I will first follow my hon. Friend in placing the emphasis precisely where it should be, which is the regional potential of Transport for the South East—I think that is the original purpose of the debate. My Department and I have been impressed by the pace at which Transport for the South East has worked, despite its young age, and I pay tribute to Councillor Glazier who is sitting in the Public Gallery observing—and, I hope, approving—the proceedings of the work he has done and the leadership he has shown. At not even a year old, TfSE has built, and continues to build, partnerships across the region, and it speaks with an increasingly clear voice to Government about its priorities. I am sure that voice will make a real difference to local

people in the south-east, and in due course to the country as a whole, since this is a principal engine of economic growth.

Local areas know their economies best, and the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) was right to say—indeed, it is an ancient Tory principle—that power should be devolved and exercised wherever possible close to the people it affects. In part that is for informational reasons, because local councils will know what local priorities are, but those priorities must be balanced with national and regional priorities, and getting that balance right lies at the heart of good transport policy. Local areas will know how best to drive growth for the benefit of their residents, and it does not need saying that transport has a key role to play. As colleagues have said, transport unlocks housing and economic growth; it gets people where they want to go for work, education, or to access and enjoy public services.

Sub-national transport bodies are new organisations that speak with a single voice for their region. Contrary to there being too much centralisation, the hon. Lady seems to have forgotten that this Government have been significantly decentralising. Metro mayoralities are an important aspect of that, as are sub-national transport bodies, which allow us and local people to prioritise the transport interventions that will make the biggest difference to people in their areas and beyond.

STBs, as they are called—no clinic required here, Sir Henry—fill the current gap between local and national transport authorities, bringing a regional voice to Government investment decisions. When local areas come together to plan long-term infrastructure, they can deliver outputs that are greater than the sum of their parts. Using evidence and local knowledge, STBs will make the case to Government for the transport priorities that they believe will drive transformational growth. The Government are hearing those voices across the country, and those bodies—including Transport for the South East—have already submitted to the Department their priorities for the second road investment period. They are also engaging with our proposals for a new major road network that will benefit from dedicated funding from 2020.

On 1 April 2018, Transport for the North became England's first sub-national transport body, and I was delighted to lay the statutory instrument for that in the House. Three other STBs are currently operating in shadow form across England, with ambitions to become statutory bodies in their own right: Midlands Connect, England's Economic Heartland and, of course, Transport for the South East. TfSE is the youngest of those shadow bodies, but it has made impressive progress since its inaugural meeting in June last year. There are also proposals for STBs to emerge in other parts of the country, including the east of England and the south-west, and I and my colleagues watch those developments with interest.

We are seeking to work closely with all those bodies to support them as they establish their priorities, develop their own transport strategies, and submit proposals to Government to become statutory bodies. That should ensure they can continue to add value to transport decision making over the longer term, but I should be clear on what we look for in a successful sub-national transport body. We want it to have a strong rationale and a coherent economic geography, and to speak with

one voice alongside its local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and, of course, local MPs. Where those things come together, STBs can be very powerful bodies, and my Department will take account of their views in our decision-making processes.

From the toil and woe that some hon. Members have told of in this debate, one might have thought that the south-east was an area in significant economic difficulty, rather than one of the richest parts of this country and indeed of Europe and the world. But, of course, with success come growing pains and strains. It is important to recognise that, and we do. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle has stated, it is important to say that the south-east is a significant contributor to, and driver of, the UK economy as a whole. We will continue to support that process in Government.

It is also worth noting—a point well made by colleagues on both sides of the House—that there is no standardised, one-size-fits-all picture of unbroken economic success across the region. There are clear and important areas of deprivation that exist, especially in coastal communities, and we must attend to those no less than we must feed the flames of economic growth across the region as a whole. To reflect both, we have provided a boost to local economies across the whole south-east, with over £1.4 billion of local growth fund money allocated to local enterprise partnerships in the region to help to encourage economic growth and housing. A substantial portion of that money has been invested in transport projects.

In addition, the Government are investing £2.2 billion in major road schemes on the strategic road network in London and the south-east of England, and investing substantially in rail schemes such as Thameslink and Crossrail, which has been mentioned, and in transformational local schemes such as the £850 million improvement—I do not think we have any hon. Members from Berkshire here—to Reading station. The Department is also investing £1.2 billion to improve local transport through maintenance and small improvements, as well as large local schemes such as the £56 million towards the Combe Valley Way link road between Hastings and Bexhill, which has helped reduce congestion and supported growth in the area.

As my hon. Friend and Opposition Members have pointed out, the sub-region contains a number of ports and airports that are nationally significant, supporting not just the south-east but also London, the midlands and the north. TfSE and its members can play a major role in ensuring that the importance of those international gateways is fully understood and that they continue to support economic growth across the whole country. That role will become more important in the future, when we look to expand trade relationships with the world as we leave the European Union.

I know that TfSE has worked hard to establish itself, working alongside Government to identify investment priorities and to establish a robust evidence base that will feed into its own transport strategy. As I said, it has made a good amount of progress in a short time, and we are pleased to see it learning fast from those that have gone before it. My officials are working hard with its members to help them to sustain that pace. As TfSE develops its economic connectivity review, which will form part of the evidence base for the transport strategy,

Department for Transport economists are providing support and advice to ensure it is able to fulfil its objectives and hopes.

Peter Kyle: The Minister's Department is clearly doing a lot of work on this and is keen to see improvements in the metrics. What metrics will his Department use to judge whether the initiative is successful, and is his Department giving the right support?

Jesse Norman: We are seeking to support the sub-national transport bodies appropriately at each stage of their development. One thing that is misunderstood is that each of those entities is at a different stage of development. The classic example is Transport for London, which is very well established and now self-funding, with its own historical settlement from central Government. That is one thing. Transport for the North is substantially funded, with £10 million a year and a lot of extra money for ticketing and so on, but it is a much younger organisation, albeit we are seeking to build capacity and work with it as it gets bigger.

Mr Dhesi: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I am afraid the hon. Gentleman may have to sit down for a second and let me answer the previous intervention. Otherwise, he can intervene on his colleague's intervention and I can try to make a sub-response to a further response.

To finish my point, TfSE is an even younger body, but we are supporting it in a small way and expect to continue to do so as it grows. The hon. Member for Hove raised the question of metrics. What metrics one sets will inevitably be those that are devoted to local needs. Part of the challenge of successful growth is not to have a one-size-fits-all set of metrics but to develop challenging local targets with the STB that meet its goals, and encourage it to meet national goals.

Mr Dhesi: The Minister mentioned Berkshire. I am from Slough, where we have not only the highest number of electric vehicle points in Berkshire, but one of the highest in the country. Will he explain what support the Government can give to our council and its partners as they seek to get more people into electric cars?

Jesse Norman: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we make a lot of money available to local councils to support the roll-out of charge points. We have given money historically to support plug-in car grants and home charging. I recently wrote to local authorities to encourage them to take up our offer, which remains open and, I think, not fully expended. He would be welcome to invite Slough Council to write to us, and we would be happy to work with them according to that scheme to make more installations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle mentioned funding for TfSE. In all STBs it is important that we are clear that local partners are committed for the longer term, and that there is clarity about what funding is needed and what it would and should be used for. My officials and TfSE have been working closely on those issues, and Ministers will take a decision at the next stage in the near future.

[Jesse Norman]

We welcome the ambition the subnational transport body has shown to become a statutory body and are working closely with it to develop that proposal for the Government. That requires groups of local authorities to pledge to come together with a proposal to the Secretary of State, including what functions they think might be best exercised at a more regional level. They may differ from one to another on that. As I have said, where those groups can show a clear mission and purpose—not just economic and geographical strength, but robust governance arrangements—the Secretary of State will be in a position to have a constructive conversation about their ambitions.

Stephen Lloyd: On that important point, the Minister knows I am very interested in the question of the A27 from Lewes to Polegate. He also knows that there is a tremendous partnership between the county council, different MPs, the business community and, I would hope, Transport for the South East in support of the new spur. Can he give any indication of when a decision will be made?

Jesse Norman: I was coming to the specific issues that have been raised. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the current roads investment strategy scheme includes a package of improvements to the existing route. We expect consultation to start in spring 2020, and are providing funding toward a feasibility study for a larger-scale bypass. Those options are being developed as we speak.

If I may press on, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to STBs. The Secretary of State will consider each on its individual merits, and the creation of bespoke arrangements for each STB will reflect the varying local transport and economic growth needs of the area. Creating these organisations permanently by statute is a serious matter and is not to be undertaken lightly. It requires the proper level of local consensus and commitment, but if it is done properly, the payoff is that the entity increases its impact and influence, as well as its longevity, and therefore has the potential to play a role in delivering transformational change.

The shadow Minister raised Operation Stack and the M20. We will recall that the disruption in 2015 was not brought about by any Brexit-related activity but by unions and by other factors. As she will be aware, the Department has asked Highways England to develop and deliver an interim solution to mitigate the worst effects of traffic disruption on the M20 by March 2019. A series of potential options can be used as part of that, and our goal with all of those is to allow non-port traffic to continue to travel in both directions.

One colleague mentioned the extension of Crossrail to Abbey Wood. I can confirm that the route to Abbey Wood is safeguarded, from our point of view, but the focus in the first instance, as one might imagine, must be to deliver Crossrail on time.

One perfectly understands why hon. Members mentioned A27 investment. They should be aware that we expect to make preferred route announcements for the improvements at Worthing and Lancing, and for the bypass at Arundel, by summer 2018.

The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) mentioned the Heathrow rail link. He knows that that important proposal will be considered alongside other national

priorities through the planning process for the next control period. That will ensure that the rail link provides maximum benefit for passengers, and will allow us to understand the journey opportunities and other possibilities that such a link could provide.

I was asked whether the concerns of Gravesham residents will be reflected in the decision on the lower Thames crossing. I can confirm that Highways England will continue to work with all stakeholders.

It is a little hard, and self-contradictory and inaccurate, for the shadow Minister to accuse the Government of introducing too much centralisation. Let us not forget that, since 2010, the Government have created local enterprise partnerships, metro mayoralities, Transport for the North, Transport for the South East and other sub-national transport bodies. They do represent not centralisation but devolution. It is self-contradictory to say that too much centralisation is going on and that devolution has created a patchwork or mosaic. With devolution comes diversity and difference. Part of the strength of devolution as an idea is precisely that we can take advantage of the best efforts and the best opportunities and examples used locally and the creativity that pushing power down unleashes.

Rachael Maskell: Does the Minister recognise that Transport for the North was absolutely clear that it wanted the electrification of the Transpennine route? The Secretary of State denied that opportunity to TfN. While the Government have created spaces for dialogue, they certainly have not given power, which is what devolution has to be about.

Jesse Norman: The hon. Lady will know that TfN became a statutory body literally weeks ago. These are very early days. There remains a role for national policy making where issues of cost and benefit, passenger satisfaction and the proper spending of public money are in play—that is entirely as it should be. The key point is that TfN exists and is functioning. It is working hard to reflect the interests of the constituencies and the economic priorities of its diverse region, which we massively welcome.

The shadow Minister offers what she calls a completely different approach. Since our approach is long term, strategic and integrated, and involves a significant increase in funding, I wonder which part of long term, strategic, integrated or higher funded her new approach will differ from.

Rachael Maskell: I will again draw on the electrification example and the words of sheer frustration coming from the rail industry at the Government's stop-start approach to control period 5. The industry has seen only blocks of funding, as opposed to the Government looking at the 30-year planning process needed across the rail network, which Labour will certainly adopt.

Jesse Norman: It is certainly a helpful clarification that the shadow Minister's comments apply only to rail. I thank her for that.

The shadow Minister raised bus tech. She will know that bus companies are investing significantly in new ticketing technologies. We rightly fund them to the tune of, I think, a couple of billion pounds a year through the bus service operators grant. The proposal she seems

to be making amounts to expropriation of the bus companies if a Labour Government are elected. That seems to me to be not only economically unwise but thoroughly contrary to the interests of passengers.

Finally, the shadow Minister raised cycling and walking. I invite Members to raise their hand if they cycled to the House of Commons today.

Rachael Maskell *indicated assent.*

Jesse Norman: I am delighted. I congratulate the shadow Minister for sharing my commitment to the cycling and walking investment strategy. I assure her that our new cycling and walking review is gathering an enormous number of good ideas about how we can put public money and better regulation, co-ordination and co-operation to better support cycling and walking. She is absolutely right to raise the importance of this issue and the importance of modal shift, and I thoroughly concur. She will know that, as a result of our cycling and walking investment strategy, public funding for those areas has roughly trebled since 2010. That is a record on which I would like us to continue to build.

Mr Dhesi: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I am sorry but I cannot; I have no time because I need to make way for my beloved colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle. I have taken quite a lot of interventions already, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows.

I am absolutely aware of the close involvement of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle with TfSE and am delighted to see the wider acknowledgement that debates like this can bring to the organisation's good work so far. I wish it good luck in its launch event on 8 May, and I very much encourage it to continue to work closely with the Department on its transport strategy and proposal to Government. I look forward to learning more about the work it is doing and its priorities as it enters this exciting next phase of its development.

3.56 pm

Huw Merriman: I thank you for chairing what has been a really good-natured debate, Sir Henry, and your team for keeping us to order. I thank the Minister. I am sorry that, unlike him, I did not cycle in today. Commuting from East Sussex, as I do daily, I would not have made the debate unless it was moved to tomorrow. I also thank the shadow Minister for her kind words.

The Minister is absolutely right when he talks about the south-east having large areas of wealth. I say to him to keep investing in us and we will pump more than the £200 billion that we pump into the UK economy as a whole to support the other regions. We can do that only with more support and investment in our area. The Minister is also right to point out that parts of the south-east—the coastal areas, which have been represented today—are deprived. Those constituents of ours deserve the same right of access to transport to link them to other parts of the UK as other deprived parts of the UK have. We very much stand up for those constituents.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) and for Clacton (Giles Watling), and the hon. Members for Slough (Mr Dhesi), for Hove (Peter Kyle) and for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), for making this a debate in which we have worked cross-party to encourage TfSE to find its voice. It is absolutely essential that we work together as a team. It is no good us looking to the team of MPs in the north or in the west midlands engine.

The reality is that the south-east is the powerhouse. We have the assets: we have Gatwick, Dover and Southampton, we have Heathrow and we have the Eurostar. Those are the jewels that we want to support. I very much hope that all MPs from across the south-east will work together to make Transport for the South East a great success.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Transport for the South East.

Christchurch Council: Governance

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered future governance of Christchurch Borough Council.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. Let me remind hon. Members of some important parts of the 2017 Conservative party manifesto. On page 9, it says:

“True Conservatism means a commitment to country and community...a respect for the local and national institutions that bind us together”.

On page 12, it says:

“Theresa May’s Conservatives will deliver...Prosperous towns and cities, underpinned by strong local institutions”.

On page 32, it says:

“We will support those authorities that wish to combine to serve their communities better.”

It is with those three commitments in mind that I invite my hon. Friend the Minister carefully to think again about the future governance of Christchurch Borough Council.

The most fundamental question that this debate raises is whether the future governance of Christchurch should be decided by its citizens and elected representatives or by the Government. The Government are seeking parliamentary approval to ignore the will of the people of Christchurch, its elected district councillors, county councillors and Member of Parliament. The issue was put before the people of Christchurch in a local referendum last December. They voted by 84% to 16%, on a 54% turnout, against the council’s being forced into a merger with Bournemouth and Poole to create a new unitary authority.

The Dorset (Structural Changes) (Modification of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) Regulations 2018, laid on 29 March, are designed to make several changes to the 2007 Act and to backdate those changes so that an application for single-tier local government does not have to be made in response to an invitation from the Secretary of State. Since the laying of those regulations, I have tabled a series of parliamentary questions to my right hon. Friend, to many of which I do not think I have received a satisfactory response. I shall refer to one or two of them now.

Why has there been no specific consultation on the regulations to which I have referred? Two sets of regulations were laid on the same day. The second set of regulations were certainly the subject of consultation and discussion, but why was there no specific consultation on the first set—the ones to which I have referred? When was the need for the regulations first identified, and for what reason were they laid more than 13 months after the need for them arose? That was when the Dorset councils made the application that the regulations are designed to validate.

The chief executive of Christchurch Borough Council has told me in an email:

“There was no discussion at any point about the need for an invitation to be made. It was only when the draft Regulations were sent to each of the Councils that the matter of ‘invitation’ came to light”.

Why did the letter that my right hon. Friend sent on 27 March to me and other colleagues in Dorset state specifically that the draft regulations had been

“developed and worked up with all nine Councils”,

when that was not correct? In one of my questions, No. 136755, I asked him to explain why the retrospective effect and impact of the regulations was not set out and why he did not consult Christchurch Borough Council in making the regulations. This Minister answered that the regulations

“were shared and developed with the Chief Executives and Monitoring Officers of all nine...councils.”

It is clear from what the chief executive of Christchurch Borough Council has said that that is not correct. In a further briefing, the chief executive said:

“I don’t recall any discussion with MHCLG”—

the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government—

“about this and my first knowledge of any of the details was in a letter, sent by MHCLG in the latter part of March to each Chief Executive to ask if their Council would give its consent to the making of Orders to bring about local government reform”.

I should therefore be grateful if the Minister would now correct the answer that he gave to my question, and the assertion that the regulations had been

“developed and worked up with all nine councils”.

The Minister has also failed to explain why he believes that the regulations have no impact on the costs of business and the voluntary sector and, as a result, do not require a regulatory impact assessment to be produced. One justification for the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 was to facilitate devolution so that businesses could be more involved with local authorities in achieving regeneration. To that end, all Dorset councils and Dorset local enterprise partnership collectively made a submission for the creation of a Dorset combined authority. The submission was made in July 2016, but remains undecided by the Secretary of State. In his statement of 26 February, he said that he intended

“now to ask the leaders of the Dorset councils how they would like to proceed with their combined authority proposal”.—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 20WS.]

Although the Secretary of State said some time ago that he would reach a decision on the Dorset combined authority proposal at the same time as making his announcement on local government reorganisation, I understand that there has been no further communication on this even since 26 February. Why is that? How is it that the Government believe that their decisions on local government reorganisation do not impact on the costs of business?

To take one topical example, on 6 March Bournemouth Borough Council decided to approve an investment in the construction of a hotel on the site adjacent to the Bournemouth International Centre involving some £70 million to be borrowed by the council, and

“to make consequential changes to the budget of the Council”.

I do not know whether the Minister shares my concern that that is another example of the abuse by local authorities of the preferential loan terms that they get

from the Government, which enable them to make borrowings at far lower cost than the private and commercial sectors.

In a letter sent this week on behalf of other hotel proprietors in Bournemouth, it is said that

“there would be a real, adverse impact on the provision of front-line services”

if

“this highly speculative venture were to fail”.

The authors of the letter describe the prospect of failure as “disturbingly likely” and say that, in such a scenario, Bournemouth Council

“would be left to service a significantly increased debt, backed by an asset which...would not cover the value of the ‘investment’.”

The loan being taken out by Bournemouth Council to achieve its objective is described as

“the very antithesis of prudent borrowing”.

If the Secretary of State has his way, citizens and businesses in Christchurch will be saddled with the consequences of Bournemouth’s decision for many years to come. It is ironic that the justification that the Government give for seeking local government reorganisation is to achieve better value for money. Over recent years, my constituents have watched Bournemouth with dismay—from the safety of the other side of the River Stour—as they have seen one failed project after another: the IMAX cinema, the surf reef and the £395,000 pay-off for the last chief executive.

I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that there is a well-established and, I think, well-founded loathing by many Christchurch citizens of the way in which Bournemouth Council behaves. That is now coupled with a real fear that if Christchurch is forced to join with Bournemouth and Poole, it will result in a diminution of the quality of services and Christchurch taking on responsibility for enormous debts, which have been brought together by Bournemouth Council at a time when Christchurch Borough Council has been prudent. It is debt free. It has done the right thing. It has quite high levels of council tax. A report in *The Sunday Times* this week said that the highest council taxes in the country are in the Dorset area. They are not so high in Bournemouth and Poole, because for many years they decided not to increase their council taxes—as was prudently required—in order to ingratiate themselves with their electors.

Now, with a gap of more than £200 a year at band D between the council tax in Poole and that in Christchurch, the people of Christchurch are really worried that in the event of a unitary authority, they will not only take on the big capital debt risks to which I have referred, but will have to subsidise people in Bournemouth and Poole who are inherently, in many cases, better off than they are. For example, Poole has residents in Sandbanks and Canford Cliffs, who are immensely better off than those in many parts of my constituency. Why should Christchurch Borough Council be expected to subsidise those people long into the future?

The Government’s proposal raises some serious issues. Recently, the Secretary of State used his existing powers under section 2 of the 2007 Act to invite proposals for structural change in Northamptonshire. By so doing, he triggered requirements for consultation, under section 7(3) of the 2007 Act, and he enabled local authorities collectively or individually to put forward their own proposals. He

has also set out guidance as to what a proposal should seek to achieve and matters that should be taken into account in formulating a proposal. None of those privileges, which the Secretary of State accords to councils and people in Northamptonshire, have been accorded to my constituents. Instead, a proposal has been brought forward over a long period of time, initially by council chief officers—with the support of many of the leaders of the councils at that time, many of whom have since been replaced—on the basis of a very dubious “consultation”, which took place as long ago as the autumn of 2016. In relation to Northamptonshire, the Secretary of State says that he would expect proposals to come forward and that they should be current, so that any business plans will relate to the current financial arrangements, rather than to historic ones, which is what is proposed in Dorset.

Harmonisation is a fraught issue. Given the gap of over £200 in the current level of council tax between Bournemouth and Poole, on the one hand, and Christchurch on the other, a new authority will need to levy a council tax that is ultimately the same across the whole of the new unitary authority area. Christchurch Borough Council has been insistent that in such a scenario harmonisation or equalisation should take place from the outset. A similar proposal has been accepted by the joint committee in the rural part of Dorset. However, in order to try to demonstrate that local government reorganisation would be good value, the consultation with the people was carried out on the basis of a harmonisation period of 20 years. Where did that figure come from? It came from a discussion that was held between section 151 officers from Dorset and departmental officials in June 2016. I have asked for notes of that meeting, but I have been told that no notes were kept. However, that meeting was really crucial, because on the basis of what was said at it, the consultation that was carried out in Dorset—designed to secure the approval of the people for a change from two-tier local government to unitary local government—was based on a 20-year harmonisation period.

In November 2017, the official in charge of this, Paul Rowsell, told me that the harmonisation period of 20 years was certainly off the agenda completely; that the maximum period for harmonisation would be five years, but more likely in the range of zero and two to three years; and that up until now there had never been a situation where councils had been abolished or restructured and the harmonisation period had been longer than two years.

So what happened? This relates to the issue of governance. When Christchurch Borough Council went to the joint committee, which it has joined to try to show good faith and co-operation, it insisted that the committee should accept the fairness and equity of having everybody paying the same council tax in a new area from day one, but that committee has shown absolute contempt for the council’s representations. Of course, that is not surprising, because in a new unitary authority Christchurch would only comprise 13% of the councillors and resources of that authority. Therefore, Christchurch’s interests will be in a permanent minority. This issue of harmonisation is symptomatic of the high-handed way in which Christchurch people will be dealt with in the future, were this unitary authority to come about.

[*Sir Christopher Chope*]

That point is also emphasised by the fact that Christchurch Borough Council has at the moment 24 councillors and there are five county councillors in Christchurch. In the proposals that are being considered, the number of councillors would fall to about 10 or 11, which would be a significant diminution of democratic representation of the people of Christchurch. That means that Christchurch people would have much less influence in the future.

The fear and loathing I have spoken about is coupled with the fact that it is well known that Bournemouth Borough Council is keen to take advantage of the fact that Christchurch has a lot of land in the green belt. Under the Government's new relaxed arrangements, if the council as a whole were to bring forward a plan seeking to remove that land from the green belt, all the protections that the people of Christchurch thought that they had in relation to green-belt land would be swept away. That is another cause for concern.

The Government have dealt with all this in a thoroughly asymmetrical way. In Christchurch's alternative submission to the Government, it suggested that one way out of all this would be for Bournemouth and Poole to merge together and leave Christchurch as it is. That was ruled out by the Government as not permissible under the rules, because they cannot force Bournemouth and Poole to merge together if they do not wish to do so. Amazingly, Bournemouth and Poole do not want to merge together to achieve significant savings, because both of them have a common interest in getting their hands on Christchurch and its assets. Although Christchurch cannot suggest that Bournemouth and Poole merge together, Bournemouth and Poole can not only object to their own merging together, but insist that they would like to merge with Christchurch in a new unitary authority.

According to the Government's rules, that is perfectly hunky dory and fair, but it is certainly not fair as far as my constituents and I are concerned. I fought the general election hard on this issue. Ironically, we face the prospect that one issue on which I fought hard, namely leaving the European Union, will be delivered on 29 March next year, thereby bringing back sovereignty to the United Kingdom to the delight of myself and my constituents, but two days later, the other issue on which I fought hard, namely that Christchurch Borough Council should retain its sovereignty and independence, will not be delivered, because Christchurch will lose the sovereignty that it has had, in one form or another, since 1216 or thereabouts—a long time.

When I refer back to the Conservative party manifesto, which talked about the sense of community, I have in mind the sense of community that can come only from a strong, historic association. Christchurch was around a long time before Bournemouth was ever invented, and it resents enormously my Government's proposals to abolish it against the clearly expressed will of the people. I recently saw in the paper that the Secretary of State has said that it would be wrong for Parliament to reject the people's verdict in the EU referendum. Likewise, the people of Christchurch think it is totally wrong for the Government to reject their verdict, which was delivered by more than 17,000 people in their local referendum last December.

4.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) on securing the debate and on his dedication to pursuing the cause. He is a living embodiment of the values that he quoted from the Conservative party manifesto about making a commitment to one's community.

I approach the debate with some trepidation, not only because of my hon. Friend's long and distinguished experience in this place, but because he held my position as a Minister with responsibility for local government, which is something I am new to. As a small boy growing up in Southampton, his was one of the first MP's names that I knew. It is a great honour to respond to him. There is a lot to get through.

The Government's aim is to enable the people of Christchurch to have as good a deal as possible with their local services. Those services are mainly the responsibility of Dorset County Council, but Christchurch Borough Council is responsible for about 20% of them. Those services are important to the local people.

Although I agree with my hon. Friend and share his joy that we will be leaving the European Union, a difference between him and the Government may lie in our belief that the proposed governance changes, for which we are seeking parliamentary approval, will benefit people across the whole of Dorset, including the residents of Christchurch borough.

With respect, it is important to note that that is not only the Government's view, in contrast to what was just said. It is a view shared by many other people and organisations across Dorset, including Dorset County Council, which has major service responsibilities in Christchurch, as I have said; approximately 79% of councillors across Dorset; and major public service providers and businesses, particularly those with responsibilities for health, police, fire and rescue, and rail services across Christchurch and the wider Dorset area.

A number of my right hon. and hon. Friends with constituencies in the area share that view. On 29 November, they wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and urged him to support the proposal that the Dorset councils have submitted, because it is the option that commands strong local support and does the job that needs to be done. They state that

"the further savings required to be made, if our councils are to continue delivering quality public services, can only be done through a reorganisation of their structures".

The view is also shared by a third of the elected councillors to Christchurch Borough Council, who wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and stated:

"We are acutely aware of the constraints on local government funding and the financial pressure that upper tier services are facing. We therefore consider it our duty to respond to these challenges by supporting the restructuring of local government in Dorset"

The representative household survey commissioned by the nine Dorset councils estimated that 65% of residents across the whole of Dorset support the proposal. Of those nine councils, eight support the proposed change and have formally consented to the necessary secondary legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch raised a number of specific points, which I shall do my best to deal with. The Secretary of State has had careful regard to the local advisory poll and its results, but as a poll of only 6% of the whole area's population, we do not see it as casting doubt on his conclusion that there is a good deal of local support across the area.

On council tax harmonisation, as the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), told the House in a written answer on 18 December, it has consistently been

“for those implementing any unitary proposal to put to the Secretary of State their proposals”

for council tax harmonisation. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch that it is for the Secretary of State to specify in secondary legislation the maximum period for harmonisation.

Although a maximum period of five years has been specified in previous restructuring, the Government have made no such specification to date. We intend to introduce secondary legislation on council tax harmonisation in June or July. In deciding the maximum period to specify, we will have regard to local preference, the impact on individual council tax bills across the areas concerned and the financial implications for the authorities.

I have highlighted the considerable support for the proposals by business. On the specific question about the timing for the combined authority, the Government have written to the various local authorities about their proposals for a combined authority. We await a response to those questions to take that proposal forward or not, as local authorities see fit.

My hon. Friend asked about the timing for laying the regulations before the House. Of course, it would not have been appropriate to lay them 13 months ago, as he said, because it was not clear exactly what proposals would emerge from the locally driven process. As I am sure he is aware, the regulations are specific to the proposals that have emerged, so they could only have been laid after the proposals were finalised. On consulting, all council executives were shown copies of the regulations and asked for their opinions.

On the comparison with Northamptonshire, it is important to note that the situations are markedly different. In Northamptonshire, the proposals for restructuring are the result of a best-value inspection, whereas in Dorset, they have come bottom-up from councils themselves. In both cases, there has been extensive consultation. The year-long development of proposals in Dorset means that there has been considerable and adequate engagement of local communities in that process.

In conclusion, if Parliament approves the draft legislation that we have laid before it, it will provide the people of Christchurch with more sustainable local governance and safeguard the delivery of local services. I accept that my hon. Friend does not share that view, and there will be an opportunity for it to be considered and debated by Parliament when considering the secondary legislation, which I look forward to doing with him and others in the coming weeks. I will close as I started, by commending my hon. Friend's dedication to his local community in pursuing the matter with such verve.

Question put and agreed to.

Internally Displaced People

4.29 pm

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered a strategy for internally displaced people.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and I thank the Speaker's Office for granting this debate. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues for giving up time on such a busy afternoon—mid-week, on a Wednesday—to address the important issue of internally displaced people.

I have no doubt that many hon. Members who are here in Westminster Hall now will have called in this morning to Christian Aid's big breakfast meeting; if they did not, they really missed out on an excellent breakfast. That meeting was designed to draw attention to the issue of internally displaced people. I take this opportunity to thank Christian Aid, both for hosting that event and for its wider campaign to raise the profile of the issue. That will also help to give a focus to Christian Aid Week, which comes up very shortly, in May.

Internally displaced people, or IDPs for short, are people who have been displaced from their homes by conflict or disaster, often for very long periods of time. That might sound like an appropriate definition of refugees, but IDPs differ from refugees in one respect, namely that they have not gone across an international border. They have been displaced within their own country. Precisely because of that fact, they are not afforded the same rights and support that refugees have under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the UN's own guiding principles on internal displacement. Those principles were established to address some of the concerns about IDPs and their exclusion from the earlier UN convention on refugees. However, at the time that those principles were conceived, the problems that IDPs faced were very different from those that IDPs face today.

Twenty years ago, refugees far outnumbered IDPs. In 1998, it was estimated that there were approximately five million IDPs, compared with about 11.5 million refugees. The interesting thing is that that situation is more or less reversed today. There are more than 40 million IDPs, compared with 22.5 million refugees. Both categories have increased in number, but their proportions have been almost exactly reversed.

Many IDPs have been repeatedly displaced for long periods of time, with the average length of displacement for IDPs now being 15 years. Just imagine being a child in a family that has been internally displaced; most of a person's childhood, up to adulthood, would have been spent in this limbo position.

Lengthy internal displacement has become a global phenomenon and it must be properly accounted for when we consider how we can support and protect those who become the victims of forcible displacement. With that in mind, it is concerning that the zero draft of the UN's global compact on refugees, which was published in January and will provide the basis for formal talks about how the international community should respond to refugee crises, contains little discussion of the unique and huge problems faced by IDPs.

[*Dame Caroline Spelman*]

IDPs are often excluded from the support offered to refugees. That is partly because, having not crossed a border, they are actually quite hard to identify. The vast majority of IDPs do not enter camps, as refugees do. Instead, on average, 75% of IDPs stay in host communities. In Iraq, the figure is as high as 90%. IDPs in host communities are not as well documented as refugees in camps, and they are therefore much harder to find and identify. If IDPs go undocumented, it is difficult to provide them with the proper support that they need.

A further reason for the exclusion of IDPs is that, because they have not crossed an international border, they remain the responsibility of the state within which they have been displaced. Unsurprisingly, this can prove incredibly problematic in cases where states have been ravaged by conflict; it may even be the state that is causing the displacement, as we have seen in Syria. The state may, in fact, be further abusing and exploiting its citizens once they have been displaced.

In 2016, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that more than half of the Syrian population lived in displacement—that is really quite an astonishing fact—either across the border into another country or within their own country. As the civil war in Syria goes on and on, large swathes of the population continue to be displaced. In recent weeks, the Syrian Government forces in eastern Ghouta have been busing people to camps that are surrounded by other Government forces and then allegedly demanding that they surrender any form of ID.

Local journalists have reported that that is part of a broader Government plan to make drastic demographic changes, whereby property is handed over to pro-Government supporters. In such situations, the people who have been displaced must feel a real sense of hopelessness. Under international law, they remain the responsibility of the state that seems intent on persecuting them.

A further example of significant incidence of internal displacement can be seen in neighbouring Iraq, where it is estimated that there are around 2.2 million IDPs. Since the cessation of hostilities and violence in Mosul in 2017, many Christians from that area now wish to return, although they face significant difficulties in doing so.

I have not forgotten the most recent visit by a Christian pastor, whose church in Mosul had been burned down. He actually came over to Britain, at the investigation of the Open Doors charity, and he brought with him a scorched Bible, which he had asked to present to the Prime Minister, as one of the most poignant reminders of just how terrible the situation is for the persecuted minorities in Iraq. He explained how he and others had been displaced and how he had set up a new church, but, almost before he knew where he was, more than 300 families had come to seek refuge within the compound where the new church was situated.

The pastor explained how hard it is to return to Mosul and to try to start rebuilding one's life all over again. We should not overlook the fact that the ISIL fighters have gone back to their original homes, so they are living in communities and making it very hard for the neighbours of Christians to welcome back their former Christian friends. The Christians are not made welcome again in the communities in which they once lived.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My own experience of visits to South Sudan is that IDPs get the worst treatment. They stayed within the country, which means that the SPLA—the Sudan People's Liberation Army—does not trust them, because it organises the refugees. The SPLA blamed the people who remained in the south for being part of the regime of the north, and out of everybody they got the worst treatment.

Dame Caroline Spelman: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's point will be made over and over again. One of the long-standing principles of international development is that, as far as possible, assistance should be given in the region so that people can remain in the region and rebuild war-torn places. However, when it comes to IDPs, that principle meets with the most incredible difficulties, and that problem must not be underestimated in any way.

The pictures that we see of both Syria and Iraq—sadly, those of us who have been to the conflict zone in Sudan will have seen similar things—show that when IDPs return to their homes, those homes are nothing more than a pile of rubble. Debris fills the streets and makes it difficult to navigate through the communities that IDPs used to live in. Sadly, uncleared and unexploded ordnance can cost lives, and certainly limbs, among those who return to these areas. They remain a very dangerous environment to return to.

The Government of Iraq and the UN agencies are working hard to try to make these areas safe, but given the level of destruction in a place such as Mosul and the high risk of unexploded devices, it cannot happen all that quickly. People are being secondarily displaced by the lengthy clean-up operation; on their return, they find that they cannot stay, and they are displaced all over again to camps or host communities while they wait for the area to be made safe so that they can return and start to rebuild something that looks a bit like normality. In January and February of this year, more than 23,000 people in Iraq were secondarily displaced to IDP camps.

Even for the IDPs who can make the journey home, and whose houses have not been destroyed, their return is often far from straightforward. They often encounter disputes over property; it is a common problem. Often, they are unable to provide the necessary documentation, and the relevant authorities are so overwhelmed by trying to resolve the large number of land rights disputes that many IDPs remain unable to return. Property disputes are an issue shared by refugees returning from other countries in which they have sought refuge, but because IDPs have not crossed an international border, their status is not as clear cut. These issues are therefore more hidden and more complex.

I want to touch on the plight of women and girls as IDPs. In the 100th year of our hard-fought battle for women's suffrage in the UK, it is entirely appropriate to dwell for a moment on how women are disproportionately affected by internal displacement. They are at greater risk of sexual violence and trafficking. Girls suffer higher levels of early marriage. In many contexts, women have weaker property rights than men, or no property rights. Those things make returning or seeking compensation for land losses even further beyond their reach. For displaced women, even simple activities such as going to fetch firewood or water can see them fall victim to physical or sexual attack.

It is important to note that women often do not find personal security following displacement. Instead, they suffer violence as they flee and frequently continue to experience high levels of violence while living in displacement. I am sure Members will remember the haunting pictures of Yazidi women in the Upper Waiting Hall. They reminded us all, in their brief life stories, of what they have had to cope with. Estimates suggest that at least one in five women IDPs have experienced sexual violence in displacement. In South Sudan's IDP camps, UN investigators found that 70% of women had been raped, typically by soldiers and police officers. The one place where a woman is hoping to find safe refuge can turn out to be a dangerous environment for her to reside in. Given the great work that the Government have been doing to support women and girls in developing countries, I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Minister could assure me that IDPs are firmly on the Government's radar. Given the sheer number of IDPs today—there are more than 40 million globally—we must take steps.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Lady is making an eloquent case about the situation of women, but is it not true that people with disabilities are also affected? They cannot make the long journeys to other countries, whether they have been disabled because of the conflict or were already disabled. Do we not need to make a special case and special provision for people with disabilities?

Dame Caroline Spelman: The hon. Gentleman makes a poignant point. I will never forget, during the war in Afghanistan, going to see internally displaced people and those who had fled just over the border into the federally administered tribal areas, sometimes to completely unofficial camps. Some were carried on the backs of their relatives. A person can move only very slowly if they are carrying another human being, especially an adult, to a place of relative safety. Those with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. Sadly, they often get left behind and fall prey to all the threats to life that pertain to any conflict zone. The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the plight of the disabled in this debate on internal displacement.

There have been some notable successes in tackling internal displacement over the past 20 years, such as the Kampala convention, which was agreed in 2012. It was the world's first continental instrument that legally bound Governments to protect the rights and wellbeing of people forced to flee their homes from conflict, violence, disaster and human rights abuses. However, much more needs to be done. Not everyone has signed up to the Kampala convention, including some of the countries we would very much like to see as signatories to that commitment.

The Department for International Development is certainly a leader in trying to promote other countries signing up to the convention. It is also a leader in its longer-term country programming in places suffering drawn-out, protracted, complex conflicts. For example, in answer to a written question relating to humanitarian operations in South Sudan, the Minister of State wrote:

"The UK is at the forefront of the international response to the crisis. Through the Humanitarian and Resilience Building in South Sudan programme, the Department for International Development will provide £443 million in humanitarian aid between 2015 and 2020 to support the provision of food, emergency shelter, and nutrition and health services, including our response to famine and severe food insecurity."

Famine and food insecurity is a big problem in South Sudan. That level of support for IDPs is very welcome, and I commend DFID for it, but beyond the provision of aid, will DFID consider developing a broader strategy for IDPs that sets out how they can be supported and their status safeguarded globally? Such a strategy would stand DFID in good stead to be a global leader on the issue of IDPs and displacement more broadly.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development recently spoke of her support for a high-level panel to look into IDPs at the United Nations, and I was delighted to hear that. It would go some way towards addressing the lack of global oversight of IDPs in the current drafts of the global compact on migration and the global compact on refugees. It is worth noting the comments of Foreign Office Minister, Lord Ahmed. He said:

"The UK—alongside partners—remains committed to the UN process to develop both a Global Compact on Migration and a Global Compact on Refugees. The decision by the United States to withdraw from the former does not alter the UK Government's commitment to engage fully and work towards the successful delivery of these compacts. We believe that the Global Compact on Migration should offer an effective international framework to ensure that migration is safe and orderly and that it should balance the rights and responsibilities of both states and migrants."

Those are incredibly important words for anyone who has seen the general chaos and risks associated with people fleeing at speed from conflict. It is incredibly important to try to bring order to that chaos and safety for the most vulnerable among those who flee.

I encourage the Secretary of State for International Development to join such countries as Denmark, Sweden and Austria in supporting the calls for an expert report on refugees and IDPs to be commissioned by the UN Secretary-General. Such a report would serve as a useful precursor to any high-level panel on the topic. Furthermore, the UN has set up a plan of action around the 20th anniversary of the guiding principles this year. That multi-stakeholder plan of action aims to resolve and reduce internal displacement through prevention, protection and solutions for IDPs. Its purpose is to strengthen and galvanise support around the guiding principles and to add greater weight to them. I urge the Government to consider supporting that initiative alongside other such UN processes, including the high-level panel and the expert report.

I conclude by thanking my right hon. Friend the Minister for attending the debate today. I look forward to hearing what he has to say. He is knowledgeable on this subject matter, but so are those who have taken the time to come to the debate, and they will make other useful contributions to the discussion.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): This debate is on a terribly important issue, and seven Members have indicated they want to speak. I apologise, but I am going to have to impose an immediate time limit of three minutes.

4.47 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) on securing this debate, and welcome the work of Christian Aid. As she rightly pointed out, the majority of displaced people around the world are internally displaced rather than refugees. Some 65 million people are displaced globally,

[Stephen Twigg]

of whom 43 million are displaced internally. I highlight one example, which is the Rohingya in Burma. Many Rohingya are internally displaced, so do not qualify as refugees. The Select Committee on International Development recently visited Bangladesh and saw the plight of the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, but we were refused visas to visit Burma, so we were unable to meet the internally displaced. It would be great if the Minister talked about the work that the UK is doing to support the Rohingya and other minorities within Burma who are internally displaced.

As crises in such places as Syria, Iraq, Burma, Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan become more protracted and complex, it is vital that the world system responds. I echo what the right hon. Lady said about the importance of the UK giving support to the call for the UN Secretary-General to commission an expert report looking at the position of IDPs around the world and how humanitarian systems can be improved to help them.

The sustainable development goals—the global goals adopted in 2015—are very relevant here. For example, goal 13 is about tackling climate change. Some 25 million are displaced by natural disasters, and minimising the impact of climate change is a powerful tool of prevention. SDG 4 is about education. This morning we were in this Chamber talking about the protection of children. The Select Committee recently published our report on global education. It is vital that internally displaced children have access to education, not least when, as the right hon. Lady reminded us, they are likely to be displaced on average for 15 years. Thirdly, goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies is the goal for which the UK rightly fought. Within that, we need to ensure that religious minorities, women and girls, disabled people and others are fully protected.

The International Development Committee has decided that we will hold an inquiry later this year on displacement in Africa. We will focus on both IDPs and refugees. The inquiry is topical because, as the right hon. Lady said, it is the 20th anniversary of the guiding principles on internal displacement. It will give us an opportunity to look at the work of the Department for International Development; the work of the UN, particularly following the adoption of the new compacts on refugees and migration that are due in September; and the important Kampala convention, to which she referred.

Let us work together in this House to ensure that the very real needs of IDPs are fully reflected in UK policy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Order. One or two speakers have dropped out, so there now may be an opportunity for interventions—I am sorry about that, Mr Twigg. I call David Duguid.

4.50 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Thank you, Mr Davies. I have redacted some of my speech, so will keep it short anyway. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) on securing this important debate.

The number of internally displaced persons in the world is both staggering and unacceptable. As has been mentioned, about 40 million people worldwide have been made IDPs by conflict and violence alone. More than 24 million new displacements were caused by natural disasters and meteorological events in 2016 alone. Africa and the middle east account for the majority of displacements due to conflict and violence, and over in South America, Colombia is the single country with the most people—more than 7 million—who are internally displaced for those reasons. South and east Asia have the most displacements due to disasters. Even Europe has millions of IDPs, especially Ukraine. In 2016, 1.7 million people had been displaced there, in large part due to Russian aggression.

I must declare an interest at this point. My wife is originally from Azerbaijan, where 600,000 people were internally displaced. Compared with some of the numbers I have been reading, that is still a large number, but it is not as large as in some of the other countries that I mentioned. Nevertheless, those 600,000 IDPs mean that Azerbaijan still has one of the highest numbers of IDPs per capita—I think the population of Azerbaijan is about 10 million.

IDPs are faced with a unique range of challenges and difficulties. They are in their own country, but they are not at home. They are, in general, citizens in the countries where they are displaced, but in many cases they are denied their rights as citizens. Their Government may even be the reason they have been forced from their homes in the first place.

I applaud the action the UK Government have taken to help IDPs around the world. In Syria, for example, the UK is one of the largest bilateral donors—I think we are the second-largest. The UK has put large amounts of funding towards providing IDPs with a range of support, including food, water, healthcare, and shelter, and has supported UN efforts to ramp up international support for Syrian IDPs. I am also pleased that the UK Government are committed to diplomatic efforts around the world to end conflict, restore peace and pave the way for the return of IDPs to their homes. However, it is crucial that we redouble our efforts and take a lead in supporting IDPs so that we can stop this grave issue from growing.

Such efforts would certainly be complex—from working to end conflicts, to developing credible solutions to cases of displacement, promoting human rights, preventing conflicts from developing in the first place, and to working with countries to make communities more robust to natural disasters. Despite that complexity, we need to act. The problem is simply too big and too tragic for us to allow it to continue growing. I trust that the UK Government will continue to lead and work hard for a brighter future for the tens of millions of IDPs around the world.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Order. As I mentioned, a couple of people who were on the original list of speakers have now signalled that they do not wish to speak. There is therefore an opportunity for a couple of interventions. I call Thangam Debbonaire.

4.54 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Davies. I reiterate what you said about welcoming interventions. It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, and I thank the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) for securing this important debate. I also thank staff at Christian Aid and the Refugee Council for their help in preparing for the debate.

I do not intend to repeat what has already been said so eloquently. I want to add a specific aspect to the debate, which is the human aspect. I will read a short quote:

“One of the earliest and most prominent slogans during the Syrian uprising and the subsequent conflict was ‘The Syrian people will not be humiliated’...It should therefore come as no surprise how, after the outbreak of conflict and the subsequent massive forced displacement, many Syrians have expressed their dismay at experiencing humiliation not only by those who hold power in Syria but also by those who now control their lives in displacement.”

Those are not my words, but those of a Syrian—Kholoud Mansour—writing in a recent edition of *Forced Migration Review*. He is currently a researcher at Lund University, and he further writes of being ignored by decision-makers, even in situations where he is there as an expert, and should be in a position of equality. In the article he also quotes a Syrian woman, a founder of a Syrian organisation for education, aid and development, who said:

“I, like all Syrians attending meetings with international humanitarian agencies, feel so humiliated.”

That woman, and the author of the article, are challenging us to look very hard at how we talk and think about displaced persons, and I am challenging us all in today’s debate to think very hard about how we make connections with internally displaced persons, which is even harder than connecting with those who are externally displaced, and how we involve and integrate them into our policy making. The author is directing his article mainly at humanitarian organisations, but I argue that we, as policy makers, are setting the tone and the context. Unintentionally—in fact, often with very good intentions—we set them slightly at odds with what Syrian people and others who are internally displaced want.

In my role as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on refugees, I have focused particularly on Syria, partly because my constituency has a link, but also because of the current crisis in which more than 0.5 million Syrians have died, 5 million are refugees, and 6 million are internally displaced. I am repeating what has already been said because that is three quarters of the population of Greater London, and six times the population of Birmingham. That is the equivalent of six Birmingham being forced to flee their homes within their own country.

I will leave hon. Members with one thought. I have struggled but am managing to learn Arabic. It has taken me a year and a half to get to conversational level. That is one of the ways I am trying to take the initiative—to hear the voices of people in the middle east who are in conflict, and who are internally and externally displaced. I urge all hon. Members to think about how they might include, involve, recognise and value the voices of internally displaced people, in policy making, as the Minister will say, and in our work.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Order. I call Jim Shannon. Can I just say that he does not have to speak in Arabic?

4.57 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Some people might think I was speaking in Arabic, but it would be Ulster Scots, which is very different.

It is always a pleasure to speak in such debates. I commend the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) for presenting her case so well, as she always does. Her compassion, knowledge of, interest in and love for other people always comes out in her speeches. I wanted to put that on record, and thank her for it.

Along with others, I received a briefing from Christian Aid earlier this year. Today we received an update on where we are. We should thank Christian Aid for all its does. Its staff have been very industrious in ensuring that we all have the facts and figures for this debate.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way—I pulled out to give more people time, as there were too many speakers. I commend to anybody watching this debate the briefing from Christian Aid. For further background, I would direct people to Christian Aid’s website, where they can learn a bit more. I also commend Christian Aid’s ideals of a FAIR solution—one that is funded, ambitious, inclusive and respectful. Those are great headings under which to work.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. His words are very much what we are all thinking in this House today.

More than 40 million people are currently displaced within their own country due to conflict. That is the equivalent of 60% of the population of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Women account for 50%, and a further 40% are children—so 90% of the displaced are women and children.

There are internally displaced people in Syria, Sudan, Colombia and Iraq, as has been said, and the number of internally displaced has more than doubled since the creation of the guiding principles in 1998. Oh that the guiding principles had been adopted by all those countries, and we would be a step further on. Internally displaced people represent more than twice the number of refugees in the whole world. It is simply heart-breaking.

I will make some brief comments as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the freedom of religious belief, and on the persecution of Christians across the world. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced in countries in the middle east, with families who have had to leave their homes and businesses, unable to return. People had worked their whole life for all they had and had to walk away.

Women are disproportionately affected by internal displacement, and are at greater risk from sexual violence and trafficking. Girls suffer higher levels of early marriage and women have weaker or no property rights and no recourse to compensation for land losses. They can be subject to physical or sexual abuse when carrying out simple activities such as fetching firewood or water. Women often do not find personal security following displacement. I make a special plea for the women and children.

Thangam Debbonaire: The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent case. Is he aware that a compounding problem for internally displaced women and children is the lack of documentation, particularly if children are born without the location of the father being known, or without a living father? In certain countries, that makes documentation impossible.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady always adds to any debate she takes part in and adds a significant point to this discussion, which we would all endorse.

We are fortunate. We know that the Minister is an exceptional person, not just because he is here, but because his interest in this subject is renowned. We are all hopeful that his response will encapsulate the points we all make. Not to leave her out, I have got to know the shadow Minister personally, and I know she is also committed. What we are saying, we are saying together.

In South Sudan, UN investigators have said that 70% of women have been raped, typically by soldiers and police officers. Some 80% of IDPs live in urban areas. The countries most affected by internal displacement are some of the most afflicted by child marriage. I do not know how anyone else feels about child marriage, but it really nyarks me, to use an Ulsterism. I am very uneasy with it. In the Central African Republic, as many as 68% girls are married by the age of 18, and in South Sudan, more than 50% are. Such things should never happen. I do not know whether we have to address the culture in those countries or whether they just need a lesson on where we are. The levels are higher among IDP populations.

All those issues need to be dealt with and I look to the Minister to see how we can influence these things for the better—how we can use our embassies, our international development aid programmes and diplomatic pressures to bring about reform and change. How can we better work with the UN and non-governmental organisations to bring about a different and safer way of life for those who are internally displaced? Will the Minister tell us how his Department believes we can do things differently to promote a different result?

I believe we have a duty of care and an ability to help, and I would like to know that today is the first in a progression of steps in making a difference for people whose lives have been torn apart. It is our duty to be a voice for the voiceless and to speak out today for those who have no voice.

5.3 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I am pleased to see you in the chair, Mr Davies. I dispense with the usual niceties because there is not enough time, but I congratulate the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) on securing this debate.

I was made aware of the difficulties of helping internally displaced people through speaking to Iraqis and representatives of the international community when I led an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Iraq in February. We were told repeatedly that rebuilding infrastructure and the restoration of services in areas recently won back from Daesh—some 40 cities in two and a half years—was the priority, so that IDPs could return home. Managing expectations about what could be done was, however, challenging.

We were told that reconciliation would be crucial in allowing thousands with family ties to militants to return to their homes. Yet the *Financial Times* recently reported:

“Aid groups and western powers all acknowledge the importance of suturing Iraq’s divisions, but few are willing to co-ordinate with Baghdad”.

They worry, the article continues, about some of the Government’s methods,

“like walling suspected ISIS relatives in displacement camps, while forcing other families to return home before they feel safe”, sometimes when the area is not even cleared of bombs.

Dr Drew: Would my right hon. Friend accept that one of the problems is that, whereas refugees often come under the accountable control of international agencies, including the military and the police, IDPs are often subject to national agencies and therefore subject to the conflict and repression that they have tried to flee from, and they get put back into that situation?

Ann Clwyd: Indeed I would. That is a very good point. The *Financial Times* article also points out such methods

“violate international law and is a recipe for another round of radicalisation. That leaves much of the work to civil society groups, tribes and politicians with competing interests.”

There was an incredible account in *The Times* last week about the work of a young nurse in Mosul who now collects the remains of dead bodies with a small team of volunteers, which highlighted how little reconstruction has been carried out so far in the old city, though some rebuilding has begun in less damaged parts of west Mosul. Even more worryingly, the report highlighted the feeling of some there that the authorities are now enacting a form of collective punishment on Mosul, Iraq’s largest Sunni city, which was seen as a hotbed of radicalism even before Daesh took it on in 2014. There is a very real difficulty in fostering the reconciliation that will be required to ensure that many IDPs can return home and stay there.

I would like to talk about the tragic situation that colleagues have talked about in Syria, Yemen, the DRC and Colombia. However, I will conclude by calling on Governments with IDPs and the international community to do more to understand and address the challenges faced by IDPs and to engage with them. Last, but not least—who has the primary responsibility to protect and assist IDPs when their home state will not or cannot do so? Will the Minister tell us today what action the Department for International Development has taken to develop and publish a departmental strategy to support IDPs around the world, and what has been done to deliver on commitments on IDPs made at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit?

5.8 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) on an important and deeply passionate speech. I congratulate all Members of this House who share a common cause in seeing a rapid reduction in the numbers of internally displaced peoples and an increase in protections for them.

We always think of displaced people as those who have fled their home country due to natural disasters or conflict, but we often underestimate those who are displaced within their own country, as we have heard today. These are people who have not crossed a border to find safety. Unlike refugees, they are on the run at home. The displacement of millions of people within the borders of their own countries has become a pressing global concern. It disrupts lives, threatens communities and affects countries as a whole, resulting in serious humanitarian, social and economic concerns.

Worldwide, there are now 65 million people displaced; around two thirds of that total are displaced within their own countries. The number of internally displaced people has increased by 10 million in the last four years alone. In 2016, it was equivalent to one person being displaced every single second. Everyone here today should be shocked by those figures.

As we have heard, people forced to leave their home are generally subject to heightened vulnerability in several areas. They also remain at high risk of physical attack, sexual assault and abduction, and frequently are deprived of adequate shelter, food and health services. The overwhelming majority are women and children, who are especially at risk. More often than refugees, internally displaced people tend to remain close to or become trapped in zones of conflict. They get caught in the crossfire and are at risk of being used as targets or human shields.

I will give a few examples of countries with high numbers of internally displaced people. As we have heard repeatedly today, Syria has the biggest internally displaced population in the world—6.5 million people, which is 1 million more than the entire population of Scotland. Since 2011, 50 Syrian families have been displaced every hour of every day. The pace of displacement remains relentless.

Thangam Debbonaire: The comparison with Scotland is really helpful. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, like the population of Scotland, those people are teachers, nurses, architects, builders and engineers, and should be engaged? They have remained on the spot, and will be critical in the rebuilding of Syria. They need to be integrated into any peace process that we hopefully support.

Chris Law: I completely agree. They must also be involved in peacebuilding. The people who have seen acts of war and heinous crimes of war on the ground are those who will build the future peace in Syria.

The devastating famine across east Africa, combined with ongoing violence in parts of the continent, has forced so many people to flee that east Africa now rivals Syria in having the world's largest displacement area. There are almost 2 million internally displaced people in South Sudan. In Sudan, almost 5 million people need humanitarian assistance, half of whom are internally displaced.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about Africa. All African countries had the opportunity to be part of the Kampala convention of 2012. Some that signed up and committed themselves to the process in ink and on paper have not delivered on it. Is it not time that those who have committed themselves to a process actually take action?

Chris Law: I completely agree. We need to speak about this issue in Chambers such as this all across Europe and beyond to make that point. If I am not mistaken, one of the signatories is Nigeria, which has 2 million internally displaced people itself.

The numbers continue to grow, but there has been an absence of effective and lasting strategies for the millions of internally displaced people in Syria, Africa and across the world. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the UN guiding principles on internal displacement, which set out for the first time a definition and some of the vulnerabilities. This year, a joint plan of action is looking at what further steps can be taken to support internally displaced people. That work is being led by the UN special rapporteur, countries, NGOs and UN agencies. The purpose of the plan is to prevent more arbitrary displacement, improve protection and rights, and develop durable solutions to support the informed choice of those who cannot return to their home in their own countries. The UK Government must fully support that global plan, which is particularly pertinent in the light of the recent airstrikes undertaken by the UK Government in Syria. I therefore ask the Minister to confirm what action his Department will take to support and deliver the recommendations in the plan of action. Will his Department produce and publish its own strategy on how DFID will support internally displaced people around the world?

The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit made a number of extremely important commitments. For example, it committed to pass more humanitarian funding to local and national actors, and to reduce internal displacement by 50% by 2030. Will the Minister explain how the UK is delivering on the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit?

The refugee migration crisis is probably one of the most important issues of our time, and it is getting worse by the minute. Our vision of Scotland is of an open country that looks outward. We believe the UK Government must live up to their moral obligations through action and leadership. They must lead the way in putting internal displacement back on the global agenda and developing an effective and lasting strategy for the many millions of internally displaced people at risk. We cannot stand by as the numbers continue to grow.

5.13 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) on securing this important debate.

We have heard some excellent contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) highlighted that displaced people with disabilities struggle to make the journey and need specific support. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) talked about the Rohingya who are internally displaced, and about some of the challenges in the camps. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) outlined the human side of internal displacement, and said that we as policy makers set the tone. I am proud to hear about her initiative to learn Arabic to connect with others; it is so inspiring. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), and the hon. Members for Dundee West (Chris Law) and for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), for their contributions and their concern about the plight of the internally displaced. This is one of the world's most pressing humanitarian issues.

[Preet Kaur Gill]

Although refugees fleeing famine, persecution and disease across borders understandably grab diplomatic and media attention, we must not overlook or forget those who are displaced internally within their own countries. We have heard that, of the 65 million people currently displaced from their homes worldwide, more than 40 million are displaced within their own countries, and 90% are women and children. It is sobering to think that, since the United Nations introduced its guiding principles on internal displacement some 20 years ago, the number of IDPs has more than doubled. Ultimately, that means we are not going far enough and fast enough in tackling the problem.

In 2016, natural disasters caused an additional 24 million internal displacements. Every year, an estimated 15 million people are displaced by development projects. Millions more displacements, including from land grabs, criminal violence and drought, are not systematically recorded. Colombia, Sudan, Iraq and Syria have the ignominious honour of topping the list of countries with the most IDPs. Colombia, where conflict has eased and the slow, painstaking process of reconciliation is beginning, reminds us that it takes only a heartbeat to displace millions, but a whole generation to recover and rebuild lives.

It is right that the UK treats the symptoms of displacement. Just last week, the UN launched its plan of action for IDPs, entitled GP20. It promises to tackle internal displacement through prevention, protection and solutions for IDPs. Will the Minister spell out exactly what the UK will do to support that plan, how we will support it financially and politically, how we will align DFID's migration and refugee work with its priorities, and by when we can expect the UK to spell out clearly its full support? As with so many multilateral plans, the faster the UK gets behind the plan and the more vocal we are, the more likely other countries are to follow suit.

Let me turn to the second area where the UK can surely add value. The United Nations guiding principles for internal displacement identify good data as key to providing support to IDPs, yet 20 years on that data is not good enough. Indeed, UNICEF found that only 20% of data on IDPs is disaggregated by age, compared with 50% for all refugees and 77% for migrants. That is something the UK could lead on by providing technical expertise and insights to countries with high IDP populations, and enabling them to collect and monitor data on IDPs more effectively. That could form part of the global cross-Government UK strategy on IDPs. Will the Minister outline what steps his Department has taken to increase the volume and quality of data collected on IDPs?

I have spoken briefly about the importance of the Government addressing the symptoms of displacement, and look forward to hearing the Minister's remarks, but let me turn briefly to the wider context. The lives of IDPs and the issue of internal displacement cannot be improved by humanitarian responses alone. As Christian Aid argued, humanitarian efforts need to be conducted in concert with sustained investment by states and development actors to resolve the underlying causes of internal displacement, be they related to conflict, natural disasters, large-scale development projects or extreme poverty.

I am sure we all agree that, if we want to reduce and resolve internal displacement, we need to tackle its root causes, not just its symptoms. Labour has recently launched its own plan for Government, called "A World for the Many, Not the Few", in which we commit to an approach that targets action on what we believe to be the five biggest drivers of poverty and inequality. That includes a commitment to building peace and conflict prevention, pivoting the UK's approach from being one preoccupied primarily with national security in conflict settings to one preoccupied first and foremost with peace and development. It also includes a commitment to take action on climate justice, which threatens to be one of the biggest drivers of internal displacement.

It is easy to say that we will tackle root causes, but the devil is in the detail. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that the Government's strategy on internally displaced people gets buy-in and ownership from across Government, and that it is not dwarfed by the concerns of other Departments? For example, does the media and political focus on migration and refugees into the UK—driven by the Prime Minister's "hostile environment" and the Home Office—risk shaping the UK's priorities more than it should? With European donor agencies including DFID seemingly channelling more of their migration support into dissuading people from leaving their countries and coming to Europe, does the Minister agree that the job of political leaders is to rise above nasty rhetoric and keep the focus of our humanitarian support on those who need it most?

The Secretary of State argued in her keynote speech that the purpose of UK aid was to act as a "shield against uncontrolled and unsustainable economic migration". Does the Minister think that that type of language is constructive or projects the desired image of the Government's so-called global Britain?

To conclude, I call on the Minister to ensure that his Department produces and publishes a departmental strategy on how DFID supports internally displaced people around the world. The strategy must outline how the UK is delivering on the commitments made at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit by the Government on internally displaced people, and it must ensure that DFID does all it can to support and deliver on the recommendations made in the joint plan of action devised by the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs with states, NGOs and UN agencies. More than that, the strategy must bring the whole of Government to bear on the problem with a clear joined-up plan, and it must ensure that the priority in our displacement work is not to be a shield against migration or a hostile environment, but the lives of the 40 million people at risk.

5.22 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. First and foremost, I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) for securing the debate and for her courtesy in passing me a copy of her speech so that I am better able to respond to her questions.

In this debate, the majority of colleagues have again discussed similar things, speaking warmly and knowledgeably as they always do, and asking far too many questions—as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) on the Opposition Front

Bench did—for me to answer conveniently in the seven or so minutes that I have. I also need to leave a moment for my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden to conclude. However, let me say one or two things in response.

The debate is opportune, with 2018 being the 20-year anniversary of the international guiding principles. I very much thank Christian Aid for their work on the subject, informing Members of Parliament and bringing forward the “Big Brekkie” breakfast briefing on IDPs, which my noble Friend Lord Bates was able to attend. I am grateful that colleagues have brought the subject forward as well. Christian Aid policy officials met my noble Friend last year and are in regular touch with my Department, but my officials are happy to consider those conversations further and to meet them again.

As the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) said and as others have mentioned, more than 65 million people globally have been driven from their homes by conflict or violence—that is equivalent to the entire population of the UK. It is staggering to look back over the past 20 years and see the change in the numbers and how many of them are related to conflict.

I was particularly struck, as I have been a number of times, by the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) and the way in which she framed her comments and spoke about individual experiences. The particular vulnerability of IDPs needs to be put on the record. They are in transit from one place to another, which is disorientating in itself, and the social organisation that they have come from has been replaced—the psychosocial distress of heads of families who can no longer provide for their families, instead becoming supplicant to aid agencies and the like. That is a sense of loss and potential humiliation of which none of us has experience, but it has a profound effect. To look at the situation in human terms, beyond the large figures, is important, and the hon. Lady did that particularly well.

IDPs suffer the removal from sources of income and livelihood, and from schooling, which we now try to replace not only for refugees to other countries but for the internally displaced. There is also the deprivation of access to facilities. All that is a vulnerability and, as colleagues have remarked, IDPs are not refugees. The whole point of the internally displaced is that they remain within their countries. Therefore, in answer to the question of who is primarily responsible for them, the state is, yet the state might be the perpetrator of the very distress from which those people are fleeing, which colleagues mentioned.

The right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who understands this well, spoke about how, unless IDPs are dealt with effectively, and if we do not resolve the issues, we will have a recipe for future conflict. The emphasis on peace building, which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston mentioned, is about looking forward and not about only our policy—peace building for the future means that, to deal with an issue, we need to look forward to ensure that we have taken out the reasons for problems to recur. That is most important, and that is where the difficulty has been in dealing with IDPs.

Let me try to put some of that a bit more in context. We are strongly committed to meeting the needs of IDPs. Our work is part of a wider strategy to shift our

approach to protracted cases, to do more to protect people in such crises, to find ways to improve humanitarian access and to mitigate the effects of forced displacement. That means doing more to effectively meet the long-term needs of internally displaced people, and the communities that host them, through sustained access to education, health and jobs. Fundamentally, IDPs should not have to wait until a crisis is fully resolved before they begin to rebuild their lives.

The specific vulnerabilities of women and girls, which were mentioned by a number of colleagues, are very much on our radar screen. The empowerment of women and girls in emergencies was a priority for the UK at the World Humanitarian Summit, where we committed to put gender equality at the heart of humanitarian action, going beyond protection to make further commitments to ensure that women and girls have a voice, choice and control even when crisis hits. In many contexts the UK is working to prevent and address the effects of gender-based violence for displaced people, which includes a £25 million research initiative that is delivering innovative new programmes.

To answer the question of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston on data, we work closely with the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. A new report is out soon. We cannot have too much data in such cases, but sometimes it is very difficult to get.

I will now move on to what colleagues are looking for us to do, because we are short of time. We are exploring new options with the UN, including the idea of launching a UN high-level panel on IDPs. That would help to galvanise political and operational action by bringing together a wide range of experts to make recommendations that cut across humanitarian, peace and security, development and human rights issues. It would not solve all issues that IDPs face, but it could set out a blueprint for reducing displacement and driving a more effective response. Ultimately, learning what has worked, addressing the root causes of crises and delivering a more comprehensive global approach are firmly in the interest of those forced to flee their homes, the countries that host them and the UK itself. On our own humanitarian strategy published last year, which contained information on IDPs, we look forward to ensuring that our actions are relevant to mitigating displacement and responding to it more effectively.

We could have done with a longer debate, but I want to give the last moments back to my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden. A number of issues have been raised, and more can be raised in questions and further debates, but I am grateful for this opportunity. IDPs are an important issue and should not be neglected. All of us who have come across them, and those who work with them, are always profoundly impacted by what we have seen and heard.

5.29 pm

Dame Caroline Spelman: I thank the Minister and all hon. Members. We are all on the same page. We have sounded the alarm today. The media focus definitely does not get the plight of such large numbers and the growing problems presented. My last experience of a high-level panel was that it gave rise to SDGs. Some things need to be elevated right at the top to draw attention, but we also need solutions that are right down on the

[*Dame Caroline Spelman*]

5.30 pm

ground. That is where agencies such as Christian Aid and others come in. It will take all of us working together to address a problem of this scale.

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 25 April 2018

CABINET OFFICE

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill: Clause 11

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): The UK Government have today tabled amendments to the devolution provisions in the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. In parallel, a supporting intergovernmental agreement has been published at: <https://www.gov.uk> that sets out a number of additional commitments on how the amendments, if agreed, will work in practice.

My priority has been to reach agreement with the Scottish and Welsh Governments on the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. Over recent months, we have been in intensive discussions in order to find a mutually acceptable way forward. This needed to provide greater reassurance to the devolved Administrations that the distribution of returning powers in otherwise devolved areas would honour the devolution settlements, while maximising legal certainty on how current UK frameworks will function as we work together to implement new arrangements where they are necessary.

The Government tabled amendments at Lords Committee stage that reflected the progress made on frameworks since the autumn when we started working with the devolved Administrations on our analysis. Those amendments debated by peers established a presumption that returning powers in otherwise devolved areas would flow to the devolved legislatures. The UK Government withdrew the amendments in order to continue our discussions with the Scottish and Welsh Governments and consider the suggestions made by peers during the debate and others in their consideration of the proposal.

Following Lords Committee stage of the EU (Withdrawal) Bill, officials from the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments jointly explored options put forward by all three Administrations. I discussed the proposals with Mark Drakeford AM, Cabinet Secretary for Finance in the Welsh Government and Mike Russell MSP, Minister for the UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe a number of times in order to agree a way forward.

The new proposal, which is given effect through the amendments to the Bill tabled today and the supporting intergovernmental agreement, will see decision-making powers returning from Brussels transfer to the devolved legislatures. For a small number of areas, set out in the intergovernmental agreement, we expect that common legislative frameworks may be needed in whole or in part across the UK after the UK has left the EU. While these are being designed and implemented, we have proposed maintaining the existing common arrangements through the exercise of regulations in specific areas. The proposal emphasises the importance of joint working—the UK Government are under a legal duty to share any such regulations in draft so that the approval of the devolved legislatures can be sought before proceeding

to the UK Parliament. It also recognises though the importance of providing legal certainty where agreement cannot be reached between the Governments and where, despite this, the UK Government and Parliament consider it necessary to act; for instance, to protect the UK internal market, ensure our international obligations are met or manage our common resources. It is right that these amendments recognise that it is only the UK Government, with approval of the UK Parliament, that can act for the UK as a whole. This is built on, and now delivers in legislation, the suggestion put forward during the Lords Committee debate that there should be a presumption of acting with consent, with a means for the UK Parliament to act where agreement is not possible.

Responding to specific proposals put forward in the UK Parliament and the devolved institutions, the maintenance of existing frameworks is strictly time limited. The amendments now ensure that the regulations maintaining specific frameworks will expire five years after they come into force, if not revoked earlier, and the power to create those regulations will expire two years after exit day at the latest.

In line with the amendments tabled at Lords Committee stage, the UK Government will also be under a legal duty to report to the UK Parliament periodically on the progress made towards establishing new frameworks and therefore removing any temporary arrangements. Our preference, however, is to design and implement new common arrangements that are better suited to the UK as quickly as possible in the coming months and years.

The intergovernmental agreement covers a number of non-legislative commitments, which support the tabled amendments. It confirms, for instance, that the UK Government will not bring forward legislation for England where the devolved Administrations are prevented from doing so by virtue of existing EU frameworks being maintained. In response to the points raised in the debate at Lords Committee stage, the UK Government have committed to ensure that clause 11 regulations will not affect the operation of the Sewel convention and that related practices and conventions in relation to future primary legislation, including legislation giving effect to common frameworks, will continue to apply. In exchange, the agreement sets out that the devolved Administrations will not unreasonably withhold recommendations of consent, recognising that this is ultimately a decision for the devolved legislatures.

I welcome the letter from Mark Drakeford which confirmed yesterday that on the basis of these amendments the Welsh Government will recommend legislative consent to the National Assembly of Wales for the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. This demonstrates the significant progress made on both sides to ensure we deliver maximum legal certainty with a functioning statute book on exit day. As part of this, the UK Government and the Welsh Government have agreed that the UK Government will seek to withdraw the reference to the Supreme Court of the Law Derived from European Union (Wales) Bill, known as the continuity Bill and that steps will be taken to repeal it from the statute book.

The Scottish Government have at this stage declined to join the agreement between the Welsh and UK Government, but the UK Government remain hopeful that the Scottish Government will become party to the agreement, which builds on extensive work between the

UK, Scottish, and Welsh Governments over recent months and reflects the considerable and constructive policy development. Irrespective of our ongoing discussions, the UK Government will honour the commitments they have made towards the Scottish Government in these documents, including seeking their agreement before maintaining a temporary framework.

The Northern Ireland civil service has been kept informed of developments. Our priority is to see a restored Northern Ireland Executive. The intergovernmental agreement remains open to incoming Ministers in a future Northern Ireland Executive. I am writing to Northern Ireland parties to update them on the latest position in relation to the EU (Withdrawal) Bill.

As a result of these changes, the devolved legislatures will see a significant increase in their decision-making powers as a result of EU exit. I look forward to continuing to work with them on designing new arrangements and will continue to keep the UK Parliament updated on that progress.

[HCWS646]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Sir Tim Barrow, the UK's Permanent Representative to the European Union, represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting in Luxembourg on 17 April 2018.

The agenda covered: Reform of the Electoral Act, Rule of Law in Poland / Article 7(1) Treaty on European Union (TEU) Reasoned Proposal and, under any other business, the Commission's annual enlargement package.

A provisional report of the meeting and the conclusions adopted can be found on the Council of the European Union's website at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2018/04/17/>

Reform of the Electoral Act

Ministers discussed proposed amendments to the electoral law governing European Parliamentary elections. The majority of member states supported the text. The presidency indicated its hope that the file will be adopted by written procedure before the end of April to enable the proposals to come into force ahead of the 2019 EP elections.

Rule of Law in Poland / Article 7(1) TEU Reasoned Proposal

The Commission provided a positive assessment of progress in the dialogue between the Commission and the Polish authorities regarding the rule of law and Poland's judicial reforms. Although changes introduced by the Polish Government to the reforms so far did not fully satisfy the Commission's concerns, the Commission hoped that outstanding issues could be resolved in the coming weeks. The Commission indicated that it expected to present its final assessment on the rule of law at the next GAC in May.

The UK intervened to welcome progress and emphasise the importance of the issues and values at stake. The UK welcomed the positive momentum in the dialogue towards a solution and affirmed its support to both parties in taking dialogue forward.

AOB - Annual Enlargement Package

The Commission presented the 2018 annual enlargement package, assessing progress of the six western Balkan countries and Turkey on meeting the criteria for EU membership. The package recommended opening accession negotiations with Albania and Macedonia. The Presidency concluded by expressing hope that member states would reach agreement on the enlargement conclusions in June.

[HCWS643]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Wilton Park: Tailored Review

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): I am announcing today the start of a tailored review of Wilton Park, an executive agency of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The principal aims of tailored reviews are to ensure public bodies remain fit for purpose, are well governed and properly accountable for what they do.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tailored-reviews-of-public-bodies-guidance>.

Wilton Park is an executive agency of the FCO, which convenes discreet dialogue on the UK's strategic foreign policy priorities. It has shaped and delivered events since 1946 linking a global network of experts from a range of sectors, including academia, the military, civil society, business, politicians and diplomats.

The review, the first since 2015, will provide a robust scrutiny of and assurance on the continuing need for Wilton Park—both its function and its form. If this process finds the agency should be retained in its current form and status, it will then consider how Wilton Park can deliver on its core mandate more effectively and efficiently. It will also assess the control and governance arrangements that are in place to ensure that Wilton Park and the FCO are complying with recognised principles of good corporate governance.

In conducting this tailored review, officials will engage with a broad range of stakeholders across the UK and overseas, including staff, management and the board of Wilton Park. These consultations will include participating and sponsor organisations of Wilton Park events as well as partners from across UK Government, foreign Governments, international organisations, business, academia and the third sector.

The review will follow guidance published in 2016 by the Cabinet Office: 'Tailored reviews: guidance on reviews of public bodies'. The terms of reference for the review can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk>.

I shall inform the House of the outcome of the review when it is completed and copies of the report of the review will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS642]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: Interim Report

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): I am pleased to announce that the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse has, in accordance with its terms of reference, today published its Interim Report [HC 954]. Pursuant to section 26 of the Inquiries Act 2005, I am also laying a copy of the report before the House.

The report will be published on the inquiry's website at: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk>

and at: <https://www.gov.uk>. Copies will also be available in the Vote Office.

The interim report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the inquiry so far, together with emerging themes and recommendations.

Across Government, the interim report will be given careful and proper consideration. Discussions with business managers are currently in hand to schedule a debate to be held in Government time to enable the House to fully discuss the content.

I would like to thank Professor Jay and the panel for their continued work to uncover the truth, expose what went wrong in the past and to learn the lessons for the future.

[HCWS645]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

World Bank Group Capital Increases and Reform

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): I am pleased to confirm that on Saturday 21 April, World Bank governors welcomed the package of additional financing for, and reforms to, the World Bank Group (WBG). As a shareholder to the WBG, the UK is expected to contribute. The UK contribution of around \$550 million (around £390 million based on current exchange rates¹) over an expected five years would support a package that is expected to enable US\$315 billion of additional global development financing by June 2030, delivering life-changing development impacts globally.

This package is firmly in UK national interests and represents good value for money for UK taxpayers. The WBG is the largest development actor globally with the scale, expertise and experience to deliver life-changing development projects. It shares UK values and projects these globally. This package will further enable the WBG to support global development, prosperity and security, including through its work to reduce poverty; support an open, rules-based, and predictable international trading system; mobilise private finance; and address sources of instability. This will support our prosperity and security at home, while maintaining the relevance of the WBG in the eyes of all its shareholders.

As a leading shareholder, the UK Government played a central role in supporting this package helping to shape important reforms that will further enhance WBG effectiveness and efficiency and support UK national interests. These included ensuring that the share of lending going to the poorest countries will increase and that wealthier countries, such as China, will pay more to borrow. This will support wealthier borrowers in their transition from being aid recipients to aid donors. Given the WBG's impressive track record of supporting UK national interests and delivering results, and the further reforms that have been agreed, the UK Government support the package.

Governors will be asked formally to agree the package by the annual meetings 12 to 14 October 2018. DFID will lay an order before Parliament and a departmental minute relating to the increase in contingent liabilities, before making any payments towards this package (expected in 2019).

Shareholder support

The package will involve a total of US\$13.0 billion of paid-in capital from shareholders. It will also involve shareholders accepting an additional contingent liability of US\$52.6 billion, the UK share of which is estimated to be around \$1.9 billion (or around £1.4 billion²).

This would comprise:

US\$7.5 billion of paid-in and US\$52.6 billion of callable capital for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the WBG institution that provides financial support and advice to middle-income and creditworthy low-income countries;

US\$5.5 billion of paid-in capital for the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the WBG institution that provides financial support and advisory services the private sector in developing countries for projects with development impact; and

an adjustment in relative shareholding in the IBRD to more closely reflect changes to the economic weight of its shareholders and their contributions to the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's fund for the poorest countries, while maintaining UK's joint fifth single seat on the IBRD board with France. IFC shareholding would also be adjusted to ensure that it is more closely aligned with IBRD shareholding while retaining the veto of the largest shareholder, the US.

Russia was isolated in indicating that it would not participate in the package. This intransigence occurs against a wider backdrop of continued Russian efforts to undermine multilateral co-operation.

Impact

The WBG has a proven track record in delivering life-changing development results, for example, between 2015 and 2017 it supported:

286.5 million people receive essential health, nutrition and population services;

81.2 million people get new or improved electricity services;

73.2 million people, microenterprises and SMEs receive financial services; and

53.9 million and 44.5 million people gain access to an improved water source and improved sanitation facilities respectively.

The IBRD and IFC's financing models allow them to deliver many multiples of shareholder contributions in development finance. Each \$1 of capital paid in by shareholders has delivered almost \$50 in development finance. This package, and the UK contribution within it, would enable the IBRD and IFC to deliver a further US\$315 billion of global development financing by

June 2030. This additional financing and the reforms secured will support the WBG in delivering further life-changing development outcomes.

Reforms

As a leading shareholder in the WBG, UK Government engaged with the WBG management and other shareholders to support the package, while securing important reforms to further enhance the WBG's efficiency and effectiveness. These included:

Strengthening global peace, security and governance—Increased WBG investment in fragile and conflict affected states, with IFC increasing its support for the poorest and most fragile countries to 40% of its total support by 2030 (from around 24% currently).

Strengthening resilience and response to crises—A new crisis buffer for the IBRD, which would allow it to surge lending in crises. Investment in projects with climate change benefits increased to 30% of IBRD support by June 2023 and 35% of IFC support by June 2030.

Promoting global prosperity—An increase in the mobilisation of private finance and further support for economic development and market creation through regulatory reform and infrastructure investment.

Tackling extreme poverty and helping the world's most vulnerable—IBRD support to its poorer clients will increase to 70% (from around 63% historically) of its total lending and the proportion of its projects that narrow gender gaps will increase to 55% by June 2023.

Delivering value for money and efficiency—Further efficiencies. A new “financial sustainability framework” to help ensure that IBRD lending levels remain sustainable. Higher prices for wealthier countries, such as China, borrowing from IBRD.

¹ This and all further GBP figures in the written ministerial statement are converted from USD using HMRC average exchange rate of April 2018 of £1 = \$1.4,065.

² See previous footnote.

[HCWS644]

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