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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Wednesday 2 May 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

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Welfare Reform

1. **Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of welfare reforms since 2015 on people living in Wales. [905007]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): Welfare reforms in Wales are working. Since 2015, 54,000 more people have been employed; 25,000 fewer people are unemployed; and 25,000 fewer people are economically inactive. This demonstrates that welfare reforms are transforming lives across the country. As research shows, universal credit claimants spend more time looking and applying for work than those on previous benefits.

Wayne David: In January, the Wales Audit Office produced a report saying that the Government's welfare reform policies were contributing to homelessness in Wales. What does the Minister think is causing homelessness in Wales?

Stuart Andrew: We have been taking time to roll out universal credit and have responded to some of the needs and suggestions put forward, which is why people now get two weeks' extra housing benefit, but I would add that not every council has used its discretionary payments for housing.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): If universal credit is such a good thing, why is the Minister's Government denying some Welsh-speaking people the right to apply for it?

Stuart Andrew: I have already written to my colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions about this because I recognise the importance of claimants being able to access the service in the Welsh language. That is exactly why the roll-out has been delayed in areas with a high proportion of people who speak Welsh. In addition, Welsh speakers can access some services via a freephone line.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Some 13% of adults in Wales received treatment for their mental health in 2015, and one in four of the wider Welsh

population are thought to live with a mental health condition. Many suffering with mental illness are too ill to work. Last year, I was told by the Government in a response to a parliamentary question:

"No psychologists or psychiatrists are currently employed by Centre for Health and Disability Assessments to conduct work capability assessments."

Will the Minister join me in requesting a meeting with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to discuss reviewing this policy and ensuring that those suffering from mental illness are properly assessed by professionals and not denied the welfare to which they are entitled?

Stuart Andrew: We have been very careful to consult a wide range of experts—people working for disability charities and medical professionals—to make sure we get these assessments right. The hon. Gentleman is right that mental health needs to be looked at very carefully, and I will take up his invitation: I will meet my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Network Rail: Electrification

2. **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): If he will discuss with Network Rail its decision to reduce levels of investment in south Wales; and what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the cancellation of the electrification of the line between Cardiff and Swansea. [905008]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): Network Rail's budget for investment in the Wales route is more than £1.3 billion—record investment in Wales' railway infrastructure. Passengers in south Wales are also directly benefiting from our £5.7 billion of investment in the new intercity express trains operating from west Wales through Swansea to London.

Geraint Davies: The Secretary of State knows that Wales has 5% of the population and 6% of the railways yet less than 2% of the investment. Network Rail has just cut £1 billion from its projects, and £700 million has been cut from rail electrification. Will he now promise to support the Swansea bay electrified city metro scheme, alongside alignment, which would reduce the time between Cardiff and Swansea and result in faster, greener connectivity for Swansea bay?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman well knows that Wales does not operate in isolation. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), for example, has been campaigning for the Halton curve, which is in England but of course would serve north Wales and link it better with Merseyside, demonstrating how the rail network in Wales does not operate in isolation. I have met Mark Barry, the proponent of the Swansea bay metro. He is undertaking a host of work on it, and we will happily look closely at it, but I point the hon. Gentleman to the need for a decent cost-benefit ratio.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): On the subject of electrification of the line to Swansea, is my right hon. Friend aware that the South Wales chamber of commerce, in Swansea, is a darned sight more concerned about there being an old Labour Government in this country destroying industry than about shaving two minutes off a journey time?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The political grandstanding by some Opposition Members does nothing other than undermine potential investment in Swansea. Nor will we take any lectures from a party that left Wales in the same league as Moldova and Albania in not having a single track of electrified railway line.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): There is considerable disagreement about the total amount saved by the cancellation of electrification to south Wales—the figures range from £430 million to £700 million—but, irrespective of the total amount saved, does the Secretary of State not agree that there is a compelling case for reinvesting any funds saved by the cancellation in the Welsh network?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. There are opportunities for new railway investment in Wales. The Department for Transport's strategic outline business case includes a range of options, one of which is improving access to west Wales; that would be transformed by a Swansea parkway railway station, for which there is a growing demand. We are well aware of the Welsh Government's interest in linking Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, and I think that those schemes would be complementary.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Before I ask my question, Mr Speaker, I hope you will allow me to mention Tecwyn Thomas, a stalwart of Welsh Labour for many years, who has sadly passed away. He was my agent, and the agent of many Labour candidates in Wales. My colleagues and I send our condolences to Tecwyn's widow Iris, and to his family.

According to a report from the National Audit Office, the Transport Secretary knew that bimodal trains would not provide the equivalent of electrification and that no trains exist that could deliver the timetable. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Transport Secretary acted against the advice that he was given when he cancelled electrification to Swansea, and that that has resulted in poor execution of Network Rail's electrification work in south Wales?

Alun Cairns: Let me also pay tribute to the late member of the Labour party whom the hon. Lady mentioned.

A report from the Public Accounts Committee, to which I refer the hon. Lady, said that the plan for electrification between south Wales and Paddington should be reassessed on a stage-by-stage basis, and that is exactly what we did. Electrification would provide no practical journey time saving between Cardiff and Swansea; passengers would sit on the same train. I think we need to get over that issue. I am seeking to attract investment to Swansea, and constantly criticising the cancellation of a plan that would deliver no practical benefits to passengers does nothing to help that.

Christina Rees: In the Transport Secretary's statement of 20 July 2017, which cancelled the electrification of the line of Swansea, it was proposed that a new pipeline service be established for rail enhancement schemes. However, details of the process, and mechanisms for the development and delivery of the schemes, have not been forthcoming, and no Welsh scheme has yet entered the pipeline. Will the Secretary of State explain what the

Transport Secretary is doing to prioritise the funds that Welsh projects so desperately need through that pipeline service?

Alun Cairns: As I have said, there are a number of options in the strategic outline business case, and it is important for us to use that to assess the merits of the study. The increase in the costs of electrification projects throughout the United Kingdom has naturally caused alarm—I mentioned the report of the Public Accounts Committee earlier—but I am excited by the proposals in the business case. I have already mentioned the potential, and the growing demand, for a Swansea parkway station, as well as a new station at St Mellons. There is a host of opportunities.

UK Administrations: Co-operation

3. **Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): What recent steps his Department has taken to improve co-operation between the UK, Welsh and Scottish Governments. [905009]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): I was always optimistic that discussions with the Welsh Government would result in agreement on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The agreement that has been reached is testimony to the close intergovernmental working that has taken place and to the spirit of co-operation, and I am still hopeful that the Scottish Government will sign up to it as well.

Stephen Kerr: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the agreement—announced last week—between the Welsh Government and the UK Government in respect of clause 11 of the Bill shows what can be achieved when Governments work together constructively for the benefit of the whole United Kingdom and all its peoples?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend has made an extremely important point. I think the agreement demonstrates the maturity of the relationship between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations. The Welsh Government recognised the merits of providing certainty and security for businesses and communities. I am still hopeful that we can underline the benefits of the scheme to Scottish businesses and communities, and that we can attract the support of the Scottish Government.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The heavy hand of the Treasury is still delaying investment in north Wales. Will the Secretary of State commit to real devolution, as we in north Wales want the freedom to invest and attract investment ourselves, to improve our infrastructure?

Alun Cairns: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the north Wales growth deal that we are currently negotiating between the authorities and businesses in north Wales. I met Ken Skates, the Economy Minister, just last week to discuss it. We are anxious to see greater devolution, but some Assembly Members do not want that, because some areas of north Wales have traditionally felt as isolated from Cardiff Bay as from Westminster.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend extend to the Welsh Government the thanks of my hon. Members of this House for accepting the

UK Government's sensible and pragmatic proposals for resolving the issue of the repatriation of powers, thereby reflecting the fact that Wales voted to leave the European Union in 2016?

Alun Cairns: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that question, because he rightly focuses on the practical benefits and the outcomes. I believe that so long as we are focusing on an environment in which business can continue to invest, employ and represent communities in the way we have negotiated with the Welsh Government, that will put us in the strongest position to get the best benefits for every part of the UK.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I am sure that, in the interests of co-operation, the Government would not want to do anything that undermines the devolution settlement. Do they not recognise that the Conservatives are isolated in the Scottish Parliament, where there is a cross-party consensus that the EU withdrawal Bill is not fit for purpose? Will the Secretary of State therefore ensure that the House of Lords is not asked to consider the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill on Third Reading until all the devolved Assemblies have had a chance to pass a legislative consent motion?

Alun Cairns: As my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) highlighted, so long as we focus on outcomes—and the Scottish Government focus on outcomes and delivering for Scottish businesses—I am confident we can reach an agreement. The Welsh Government clearly would not undermine the devolution settlement as far as Wales is concerned, and I hope the Scottish Government will see the merits of the certainty and security that we can offer Scottish industry and Scottish business with this agreement.

Policing Budgets

4. Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of changes to policing budgets since 2015 on Welsh police forces. [905010]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): The Government understand that police demand is changing and becoming increasingly complex. That is why, after speaking to all forces in England and Wales, we have provided a comprehensive funding settlement which will increase total investment in the police system by over £460 million in 2018-19.

Jo Stevens: Cardiff hosts more than 400 major events a year—civic, political and royal—as a UK capital city, and on top of the Government's police funding cuts, my constituents are having to find money to pay an extra £3 million for the annual cost of policing those events, which is the equivalent of 60 police officers. When are the Government going to recognise South Wales police as a capital city force, with proper funding to match?

Stuart Andrew: As I said earlier, we have consulted all the police and crime commissioners and chief constables, as they are ultimately best placed to understand their local needs. Following the police funding settlement, most PCCs have set out plans either to protect or to increase frontline policing this year. I acknowledge the

hon. Lady's point on Cardiff; that is part of a national formula, but I will be happy to meet her if she wants to discuss it further.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): Does the Minister agree that policing is not just about budgets and money, although they do matter, but about leadership, strategy and organisation?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I saw an interesting statistic recently: if we increase productivity through the better use of digital technology, we could save each police officer an hour a day, when they could be on the frontline. That would be the equivalent of 11,000 extra police officers a year on the streets of the country.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I, too, extend my condolences to the family of Tecwyn Thomas. He was well known, and was ready to work with other parties, including mine, to the benefit of his area.

Police forces in Wales pay £2 million a year towards the Government apprenticeship levy, yet get virtually no financial support towards training. Skills and education are devolved competences, but this levy was imposed by Westminster—cue entirely predictable confusion and buck-passing. Where was the consent decision to impose a 0.5% tax on major Welsh employers?

Stuart Andrew: In the conversations I have had with many businesses around north Wales, they have welcomed the apprenticeship levy—

Liz Saville Roberts: Not the CBI.

Stuart Andrew: Well, I have been round a number of businesses, and they welcome the levy. The fact is that training in Wales is devolved, as the hon. Lady has said, and the amount of money that the UK Government have given to the Welsh Government exceeds the amount that the Welsh Government are spending on training.

Liz Saville Roberts: I am sure the Minister shares my concern that the word “Orwellian” is overused in contemporary politics, but does he also share my concern that the Orwellian concept of doublespeak is epitomised in what now constitutes devolved consent agreement—namely, consent as agreeing to consent, consent as disagreeing to consent and consent as refusing to consent? How can Wales possibly say no?

Stuart Andrew: There have been extensive discussions with the Welsh Government, and they have recognised that the UK Government have come a long way and that the levy is beneficial to the whole United Kingdom. I hope that other Governments will follow suit.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) wants to come in briefly on this question, he can, but he is not obliged to do so.

9. [905015] **Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): A recent report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on the National Police Air Service concluded that the service was financially unsustainable and that flying hours had halved despite the cost of flight hours doubling. Is it not the reality that the centralisation of police air support on an England and Wales basis has been an unmitigated failure, and that the decision of the British Government to steal our dedicated police helicopter in Dyfed-Powys has led to a second-rate service for my constituents?

Stuart Andrew: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the responsibility for overseeing NPAS lies with its strategic board, which is made up of police and crime commissioners and chief constables, including the Dyfed-Powys PCC. Both NPAS and the National Police Chiefs Council have already announced that they are undertaking work to address the issues that he has raised, and Mark Burns-Williamson has said that many of the areas identified in the report have already been recognised and they are doing work to address them.

Rail Links with England

5. **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the adequacy of rail links between Wales and England. [905011]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): The Secretary of State and I hold regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues and the Welsh Government on modernising cross-border rail connectivity. Improving connectivity drives economic growth and spreads prosperity to our communities on both sides of the border.

Mr Dhesi: The western rail link to Heathrow—a 4-mile track between Slough and Heathrow—could mean a two-hour journey from Heathrow to Cardiff and Newport and a journey of around three hours to Swansea, not to mention huge economic and environmental benefits. The Welsh Government are in favour of this, the UK Government themselves committed to it in 2012, and yesterday an all-party parliamentary group on the western rail link to Heathrow—co-chaired by the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) and myself—was launched to reburn the Government of their commitment. Will the Minister tell us when the link will finally be built, or are we to be subjected to further sluggish studies and Government procrastination?

Stuart Andrew: I was about to be very complimentary and say that the hon. Gentleman had been a doughty campaigner on this issue, as have many people across the House. The western rail link to Heathrow would significantly improve rail journey times, and it is named in Network Rail's enhancement pipeline. Network Rail is progressing the design and development of the link, and a final consultation on the proposed alignment is expected to commence this month.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): Since the Secretary of State for Transport has agreed to give the power to award the next Cardiff to Manchester rail franchise to the Welsh Assembly, will my hon. Friend give the English

MPs through whose constituencies—which include the beautiful towns of Church Stretton, Craven Arms and Ludlow—this line passes some indication of how we can hold the Welsh Government to account on this matter?

Stuart Andrew: It is a line that I have used many times myself, and my hon. Friend is right to say that parts of his constituency are very beautiful. We have ensured that there is an agency agreement between the UK Government and the Welsh Government, so that English passengers—and Members of this House—can go to the Secretary of State for Transport and he can raise their questions directly with the Welsh Government.

Industrial Strategy

6. **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that the industrial strategy benefits Wales. [905012]

11. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that the industrial strategy benefits Wales. [905017]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): There are significant opportunities for Wales from the industrial strategy, particularly in relation to innovation, where there is a commitment to raise the total research and development spend to 2.4% of the economy. This is already benefiting Wales, with almost £6 million committed to 17 Welsh partner projects.

Tom Pursglove: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer, but will he outline how he is ensuring that research and innovation, which is a key part of the industrial strategy in Wales, is recognised across the world?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend is a key campaigner for the steel industry, and I draw his attention to the Swansea bay city deal and the industrial strategy, which has established a new national Steel and Metals Institute, not only offering long-term viability to the industry in Wales, but complementing his constituency's interests.

Kevin Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answers so far. Does he agree that the combination of scrapping the Severn tolls and the cross-border commitment to the industrial strategy represents a significant boost for south Wales, mid-Wales and even south-west England?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to our commitment to scrap the Severn tolls by the end of this year, which will benefit south-west England and his constituency, as well as the south Wales economy. We are developing a new economic region and the industrial strategy commits to cross-border growth corridors. There is a great deal of excitement in south Wales and the south-west.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): In view of the lack of news about a sector deal for steel—[*Interruption*]/—coupled with looming trade disruption caused by US steel tariffs, what is the Secretary of State doing in Cabinet to press for action to get the UK—[*Interruption*.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has been overwhelmed by just how popular she is. We will just have to hear the question again from start to finish.

Jessica Morden: In the light of the lack of news about a sector deal for steel, coupled with the looming trade disruption caused by US steel tariffs, what is the Secretary of State doing in Cabinet to press for action to get the UK steel sector a more sustainable future? When is the next Steel Council?

Alun Cairns: I have already referred to the national Steel and Metals Institute at Swansea University, which is important for the sustainability of the steel sector. On the US trading arrangements on steel, the UK and European exemption was extended last week, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade has travelled to the US specifically to discuss the matter. I have also raised the matter with the US ambassador here, and we are optimistic.

Mr Speaker: It is not possible to be more grateful to the Secretary of State.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): At the heart of the industrial strategy is a commitment to 5G connectivity for businesses in Wales. Most businesses across Wales, including in my constituency, have little or no connectivity and slow connections. The Secretary of State has been warned by the CBI that the industrial strategy must be achievable. Is all this not just pie in the sky for businesses that are not connected at the moment?

Alun Cairns: I point to the commitment to the Swansea bay city deal and to our ambition for Cardiff to be a 5G testbed, and we are excited for the opportunities that they will bring. As for connectivity, the Welsh Government have a significant responsibility and, although they have recently committed more money, I ask them to look at their planning rules. The highest that a mast can be in Wales is 15 metres, whereas masts can go to 25 metres in England.

Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon

7. **Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab):** What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the effect on the Welsh economy of the Government not yet having made a decision on the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. [905013]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): I have regular discussions with Ministers at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on energy matters pertaining to Wales, including the potential role that tidal could play in our energy mix. As I have said previously, it is an untried technology, so it is quite right that we take time to consider both the opportunities and challenges that it presents.

Liz Twist: Will the Secretary of State now make a statement on the timetable for a decision on the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon? Has he asked his colleagues in BEIS to commit to such a timetable?

Alun Cairns: I have regular discussions with my colleagues in BEIS and with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy about the project. We would like it to go forward, but it must

provide value for money, so it is right that we take time to consider the matter. Data has been shared with the Welsh Government, demonstrating the partnership approach that we are determined to take, but no one should want the project to go ahead if it does not represent good value for money for the taxpayer.

Leaving the EU: Welsh Economy

8. **Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the effect on the Welsh economy of the time being taken to legislate on the UK leaving the EU. [905014]

14. **Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the effect on the Welsh economy of the time being taken to legislate on the UK leaving the EU. [905021]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): The agreement reached between the UK Government and the Welsh Government on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill will ensure that we exit from the EU with the certainty and continuity that businesses and communities across Wales have called for.

Bambos Charalambous: Will the Minister reassure the House, and businesses across Wales, by confirming that arrangements will be put in place to ensure that new trade deals negotiated after we leave the European Union do not undermine devolved policies?

Alun Cairns: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman is looking at the opportunities that leaving the European Union provides. Obviously, exports from Wales to the rest of the world are expanding at a much quicker rate than exports to the European Union, which demonstrates that businesses are already looking to those new opportunities, and more Members are looking to those opportunities as we have them.

Anna McMorrin: My constituent Damian Harris owns a cycle shop in Cardiff North but is struggling because of the uncertainty caused by Brexit. Twenty-nine of the 30 bikes he stocks come from the EU and, at the very least, he needs a customs union to have any sort of viable future. We are now hearing that 60 Tory MPs are plotting to sink their own Government to force the Prime Minister to abandon any form of customs arrangement. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that he will work with the Welsh Government and speak up against that decision? A low-skilled workforce and—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are grateful for the hon. Lady's thoughts but, unfortunately, one has to take account of the situation in the Chamber. The question needed to be a bit shorter.

Alun Cairns: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is absolutely clear that we will be leaving the customs union but, of course, we are keen to negotiate to allow for the most frictionless trade possible with the European Union. We are also keen to take the new opportunities that leaving the European Union provides. We are keen to strike trade agreements right around the world, and to strike free trade agreements in due course.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that Labour's economic development spokesman in the Welsh Government, Ken Skates, has spoken of the fact that Wales is receiving record amounts of inward investment. He said that Wales is "punching above its weight" at the moment. Is it not time that Labour Members started to listen to their own economic development Minister in Wales and stopped talking down the Welsh economy, which is booming under this Government?

Alun Cairns: Having met international investors from Japan, Qatar, the US and elsewhere over recent months, I am excited and optimistic about our prospects outside the European Union. Yesterday it was a privilege to be part of the inaugural flight from Qatar to Cardiff, which demonstrates that the industrial strategy, and the wider approach taken by the UK Government in seeking new markets, is already working.

Reoffending Rates

10. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to reduce reoffending rates in Wales. [905016]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): Continuing the success of the "Wales reducing reoffending strategy", the Prison Service in Wales, working with the Welsh Government, recently launched a joint framework to support those at risk of offending in Wales by focusing on early intervention to reduce the number of people entering the criminal justice system.

Bob Blackman: Does my hon. Friend agree it is vital that prison governors prepare offenders for life outside prison? For that purpose, will he therefore draw on the lessons from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which has already been implemented in England?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend knows more about the Homelessness Reduction Act than anyone, and I congratulate him on the hard work he did to introduce the Act. He will be pleased to hear that the Ministry of Justice recently reached its target early to recruit 2,500 additional prison officers so that prisons can start to introduce a key worker model. This new model will mean prisoners have a dedicated officer to help them access services, many of which are devolved in Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked— Engagements

Q1. [905092] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 2 May.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I know that Members across the whole House will wish to join me in offering our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Michael Martin, latterly Lord Martin of Springburn, who died earlier this week. He served as Speaker for nearly nine years, and I am sure Members will remember his sense of public service, his commitment to his constituency in Glasgow and his good humour. I particularly remember him for the courtesy he always showed me.

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.

Wera Hobhouse: Upskirting is the vile practice of taking a photo under a woman's skirt without her consent. It is neither a specific nor a sexual offence under the current law in England and Wales. I have been working closely with Gina Martin, who has been campaigning for months to change that, and her lawyer to produce a private Member's Bill to make upskirting a specific crime under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. They have both joined us here today.

Does the Prime Minister agree with us that the law in England and Wales should be reformed so that, in all circumstances, women like Gina and, indeed, the Prime Minister herself will be protected from upskirt images being taken without their consent?

The Prime Minister: May I first say to the hon. Lady that I share the outrage at this intrusive behaviour that she has referred to and the distress it can cause to victims? We are determined to ensure that victims do have confidence that their complaints will be taken seriously. It is possible currently to bring prosecutions, but my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary is examining the state of the law at the moment to make sure it is fit for purpose and, as part of that work, he is considering her Bill in detail.

Q3. [905094] **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Medway has recently been shortlisted to receive £170 million from the Government's housing infrastructure fund, which will help to build and support 12,000 houses locally, having also benefited from the £6 billion Government lower Thames crossing. Can the Prime Minister confirm that this demonstrates the Government's commitment to supporting local communities?

The Prime Minister: We absolutely share my hon. Friend's concern about ensuring that we are supporting local communities, and that we are delivering better infrastructure in those communities and maximising the potential of our country. The housing infrastructure fund is an important part of that. We need to build more homes across this country, but we also need to ensure that the infrastructure is there to support those homes and help those local communities. That is exactly what we are doing.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to Michael Martin, the former Labour MP for Glasgow, Springburn and later Speaker of the House. He worked in the engineering industry in Glasgow and was active in the then Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. He and I first met when we were fellow organisers in the National Union of Public Employees in the 1970s, campaigning for decent public sector pay and a national minimum wage. Michael loved the community he represented and loved his family, and our deepest thoughts and sympathies go to his family at this time.

Did the Prime Minister feel the slightest pang of guilt when the Home Secretary was forced to resign due to the failures of her predecessor?

The Prime Minister: I think it might be helpful if I first update the House on the actions the Government have taken and are continuing to take in relation to the

Windrush generation. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be addressing the House on this later today. We all share the ambition to make sure we do right by members of the Windrush generation, which is why he will be announcing a package of measures to bring transparency on the issue, to make sure that the House is informed, and to reassure Members of this House but, more importantly, to reassure those people who have been directly affected. Speed is of the essence and my right hon. Friend will be commissioning a full review of lessons learned, independent oversight and external challenge, with the intention of reporting back to this House before we rise for the summer. The review will have full access to all relevant information in the Home Office, including policy papers and casework decisions.

Jeremy Corbyn: This was a crisis made in the Home Office by successive Home Secretaries. Only a week ago today, the right hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), then Home Secretary, was denying there were any targets, in front of the Home Affairs Committee. On Monday, the Prime Minister told the media:

“When I was Home Secretary, yes, there were targets”.

One wonders why the Prime Minister didn't tell her Home Secretary about that. The pain that has been caused to the Windrush generation needs to be resolved very rapidly, with full compensation paid as quickly as it can possibly be done and an understanding of the hurt that they feel. But this is not the only failure of this Government or of their policies. The Government used to talk about a “long-term economic plan”, but now we have the slowest growing economy in the G7. The Chancellor, sitting two places along from the Prime Minister, told the House that he had a “positively Tiggerish” view of the British economy, yet it has the worst economic growth figures for five years. What plans do the Government have to change course to ensure we do get economic growth?

The Prime Minister: First, may I say to the right hon. Gentleman, on the Windrush generation, I was Home Secretary when some of these decisions were taken and mistakes were made about individual cases, and I have apologised for that. The former Home Secretary also apologised for that. The right hon. Gentleman is right in saying that these are decisions that have been taken under successive Home Secretaries, including under the last Labour Government, and if he wants to talk about the economy, let's just look at what we have seen in our economy in recent weeks: day-to-day spending in surplus for the first time in 16 years; the lowest net borrowing in over a decade; exports of goods and services at a record high; employment at a record high; and real wages up. That is a Conservative Government delivering an economy fit for the future.

Jeremy Corbyn: Four facts about the economy: more people in debt, more people using food banks, more people sleeping on our streets, and more children in poverty. The consequences of decisions made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer are that the NHS is suffering the longest funding squeeze in history. It has sent our health service into an all-year-round crisis. Will the Prime Minister apologise to NHS patients waiting longer than ever for the worst A&E waiting times on record?

The Prime Minister: I gave the right hon. Gentleman some facts about the economy; I can give him some others: more people in work, and actually fewer children in absolute poverty under this Government. When it comes to the national health service, since November my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced £10 billion extra for the national health service. I have also said that we want to ensure that the national health service is able to operate on a long-term plan. That is why we are conducting a review to produce that long-term plan, with sustainable multi-year funding. That is the sensible approach to take—not just to say that this is all about money, but to say, “How can we ensure that the NHS is the NHS that will deliver for people in the future?” That is about funding. It is also about reforming the NHS to make sure that patients get the right treatment.

Jeremy Corbyn: Not only was March the worst month on record in A&E departments; it was also the worst month for cancelled operations. There are 100,000 vacancies for NHS staff—and the Prime Minister personally intervened to overrule the Health Secretary and the previous Home Secretary when they asked for a relaxation of visa rules in order to recruit staff to work in our NHS.

But it is not just the NHS where the Government are damaging our public services. In January, the Education Secretary promised that no school would see a cut in its funding. Last week, he was invited to repeat that pledge, and refused. I wonder why. Will the Prime Minister now tell parents, teachers and students the truth—that the schools budget is in fact being cut in real terms all over the country?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong. What we are doing is ensuring that there is more money available to schools. We are ensuring that we are protecting that core budget, because we want to ensure that every child, regardless of their background, gets the education that they need and the education that fulfils their potential. That is why, once again, it is not just a question of the money you put in; it is about how you spend the money you are spending. That is why I am pleased to say that 1.9 million more children are in good or outstanding schools under this Government and education standards are going up under this Government. That means more opportunities for our young people.

Jeremy Corbyn: It is quite astonishing that the Education Secretary has been corrected by the UK Statistics Authority. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that schools budgets are being cut, and the Prime Minister still appears to be in denial. It is not just in the NHS and education that this Government are damaging our public services; it is also about police budgets. The previous Home Secretary claimed there was no link between police numbers and serious violent crime; yet Home Office civil servants said there is a link. Who does the Prime Minister think is right?

The Prime Minister: First, on crime and police budgets, we are of course this year making available £450 million more for police forces across the country. We have been protecting police budgets, which is in direct contrast to what it was suggested to me I should do by the former

shadow Home Secretary and Labour Member who is now Mayor of Manchester. He suggested 5% to 10% cuts could be made in police budgets.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about the relationship between police numbers and crime. His own shadow Police Minister has said in terms that there is not that relationship between police funding and the number of crimes that take place. Once again, it is about how we ensure we are dealing with these issues. It is about ensuring about that the police are able to deal with the challenges and crimes of today, and that is what we are doing with our serious violence strategy and our National Crime Agency—taking action across the board to ensure that our police are able to keep people safe.

Jeremy Corbyn: Our shadow Police Minister was pointing out that there has been a £2.3 billion cut in police budgets in the last Parliament, and it is the Prime Minister's Government who are underfunding our police force: 21,000 police officers have lost their jobs since 2010, and 6,700 police community support officers lost their jobs. Meantime, violent crime is rising and, sadly, there are deaths from knife crime on the streets of most cities, particularly in London.

The economy is slowing, homelessness is rising, more children are living in poverty, the Home Office is in chaos and the Government are making a complete shambles of the Brexit negotiations. They are damaging our NHS, damaging our children's schools and cutting police as crime soars, and they claim to be "strong and stable"! With council tax rising by more than 5% all over the country, is not the truth facing voters tomorrow that with the Tories you pay more and you get less?

The Prime Minister: More funding going into the NHS, more funding going into our schools, more funding going into social care, but if the right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about council tax and its impact on local residents, I suggest he go to Hazelbourne Road in Clapham. On one side of the road in a typical home someone will pay nearly £1,400 in council tax. Now that, of course, is in Labour-run Lambeth. On the other side of the road, someone in a typical home will pay just over £700 in council tax. That is in Conservative-run Wandsworth. No clearer example can there be that Conservative councils cost you less.

Q7. [905098] **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): In 331 days, 11 hours, 40 minutes and 22 seconds, the Prime Minister will be leading us out of the European Union. She will end the free movement of people, we will stop sending billions of pounds each and every year to the EU, and we will make our own laws in our own country, judged by our own judges.

My question to the Prime Minister is: in 332 days' time, will she come to Wellingborough, where she will be carried shoulder high through the streets to the echoing of cheering crowds? I will be able to show her the site where a statue to the Brexit queen will be erected.

The Prime Minister: I am tempted—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not think we are in any danger of not hearing the question, but we must hear the answer.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; we will be leaving the European Union. I am tempted to say to his request, how can I refuse?

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): A young mother in Coatbridge; a grandmother who has lived here for 50 years; a former cook in this Parliament—just three examples of people who have been wrongly told to leave the United Kingdom. Then there are numerous people wrongly detained or deported, lives turned upside down and irreparable damage to families. The Prime Minister said in this Chamber on 22 October 2013,

"deport first and hear appeals later."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2013; Vol. 569, c. 158.]

Will she now withdraw those remarks?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is referring to changes to the legislation that later became the Immigration Act 2014. He is right; and I have apologised not just for the anxiety that has been caused to people in the Windrush generation, but to those who have found that the wrong decisions have been taken about their situation. The Windrush generation are British and they are part of us, which is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is making sure that the taskforce that has been put in place is dealing with cases expeditiously and is giving people reassurance about their status here. We need to ensure that we are a welcoming country for people who want to come here and contribute, but that we take action against those who are here illegally, who break the rules and try to play the system.

Ian Blackford: Interestingly, the Prime Minister failed to remove these insulting remarks. It is easy for her to change her Secretary of State—she does it frequently—but she needs to change her policies. An estimated 120,000 undocumented children are currently entitled to UK citizenship by law, but only if they register at the cost of £1,000. This is a new Windrush generation, who will be unable to secure jobs and rent properties. These children, who are entitled to citizenship, should not be charged to exercise their rights. How can she possibly justify these policies?

The Prime Minister: Members of the public want to ensure that we have a fair immigration system and that we have rules that people abide by, and that is why we make a very clear distinction. I want people who come here legally, who do the right thing and contribute to our society, to feel that this is one of the most welcoming countries in the world. On the other side, we need to ensure that we have a system that deals with those who break the rules, play the system and try to jump ahead of others. That is what people expect from us. They want us to have a system that is fair and sets out rules, and for us to ensure that people are abiding by those rules.

Q8. [905099] **Mrs Kemi Badenoch** (Saffron Walden) (Con): Carver barracks in my constituency of Saffron Walden is home to the Royal Engineers' bomb disposal unit, which carries out life-saving but very dangerous work on behalf of all us. Will the Prime Minister tell the House what the Government's veterans strategy is, and how it will help soldiers such as those at Carver barracks in their transition to civilian life?

The Prime Minister: We very much value the work done by the explosive ordnance disposal units of 33 and 101 Engineer Regiments. The veterans strategy recently launched by my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary is groundbreaking. There will be a Government taskforce from Departments across the whole of Whitehall that will focus on exactly the sorts of issues that my hon. Friend raised. It will be assessing how we can help veterans to meet the financial demands of civilian life, crucially ensuring that mental and physical wellbeing is maximised and offering the best possible advice to veterans on housing. These are key issues for veterans and they are exactly what we will be focusing on in the strategy.

Q2. [905093] **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Evidence of the inhumane and cruel impact of the Government's flagship universal credit policy is clear for all to see. Its impact has been devastating, and the Prime Minister can no longer bury their head in the sand as they have done with the Windrush scandal. Therefore, will the Prime Minister get a grip and take action to protect families from being forced further into crisis; or does the Prime Minister simply believe that the damage being done to the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities is a price worth paying?

The Prime Minister: We have been rolling out universal credit at a pace that ensures we have been able to hear from those who have been affected by it and to make changes—and changes have been made in the way that universal credit is introduced in this country. We have ensured that we have reduced the seven days' waiting time, for example. But what lies behind universal credit is the belief that the important thing to help to sustain families is to get people into work. The evidence on universal credit is that it is doing just that: it is helping people into work. I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman should welcome a policy that helps people to get into the workplace.

Q9. [905100] **John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): A couple of weeks ago, the Prime Minister indicated that she was minded to visit my constituency of Carlisle. I am delighted to inform her that from 4 June she will be able to fly into Carlisle on a commercial flight for the first time in 30 years. She will arrive in a city that is at the centre of the United Kingdom and a city recently described as "the beating heart" of the borderlands region. But if Carlisle and the borderlands are to succeed, thrive and grow, we need Government support. Can the Prime Minister confirm that she will give the borderlands such support?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I join my hon. Friend in welcoming the return of commercial flights to Carlisle airport, which will allow more people to access the borderlands region. He talks about support for the borderlands. Of course, the borderlands growth deal that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor committed to is an important part of that. I would like to congratulate my hon. Friend on his recent appointment as borderlands growth deal champion. I am sure that he will be doing all he can to ensure that that Government support is there and that the borderlands continue to thrive.

Q4. [905095] **Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): The Prime Minister has said many, many times that she will have no hard border between Dublin and Belfast. Can she tell this House, just once, what sort of a border she would like to see between Dublin and Holyhead?

The Prime Minister: We have been very clear that we will not see a border down the Irish sea. We have been clear about that in the joint report that was issued by us and the European Commission and adopted by the European Council in December. When the European Commission made a proposal for dealing with the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland that would have meant a border down the Irish sea, I was clear that neither I nor any British Prime Minister could accept that.

Q14. [905105] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): With a rising budget and a new medical school for Lincolnshire, this Government have very clearly demonstrated their commitment to the NHS in Boston and Skegness, but there are short-term challenges in recruiting staff to the paediatric ward. Can my right hon. Friend reassure parents in my constituency that the decision to make a temporary closure has not yet been made, and that she will work with me to leave no stone unturned so that the trust, NHS England and NHS Improvement can work together to make sure that we recruit the doctors we need and that this Government are investing in?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend the reassurance that he is asking for. He is right that we are supporting the NHS in Boston and Skegness. Any decision taken by the trust about the services available will of course be made to ensure that the provision of services is safe for patients. The trust is continuing to try to recruit paediatricians to support the service. It wants to continue to provide paediatric services at Boston, and every effort will be made to ensure that that can continue.

Q5. [905096] **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Windrush scandal is not a mistake, nor is it an aberration; it is the direct result of the Prime Minister's policies. Unobtainable net migration targets and the "hostile environment" are the Prime Minister's policies, so will she take this opportunity to make a public apology to people who have been—[*Interruption.*] Will she make a public apology to people—[*Interruption.*] Will she make a public apology for her policies?

The Prime Minister: The hon. and learned Lady might have listened to the answer that I gave earlier in Prime Minister's Question Time. She might also have listened to the answers that I gave last week, and I was very clear in my apology to those of the Windrush generation who have been caught up in this issue. She talks about what has happened here. What has happened is that people who are here legally and who are British have found themselves caught up in this, and as I said, I apologise for that. What has also happened is that over the years, Labour, coalition and Conservative Governments have successively been taking action to deal with illegal immigrants, which is a different issue. This is an issue that has been dealt with by Governments of all colours.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): May I take this opportunity to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) on his appointment to the Home Office, which is such an important Department in terms of not only security but ensuring we have a safe and fair immigration policy? The UK threat level remains at severe. Last year we had five terrorist attacks that got through, and 36 innocent people were killed. May I invite the Prime Minister to share our admiration for the extraordinary work and bravery of our counter-terrorism police, our emergency services and our security services, for which I know we are all grateful?

The Prime Minister: First, I am pleased to have this opportunity to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and the work she did as Home Secretary. She did valuable work across all elements of the Home Office, including on issues like modern slavery and domestic violence. The work that she did with the internet companies to keep people safe on the internet was groundbreaking. I share her support and admiration for the work that all in our emergency services, our police, our counter-terrorism police and our security and intelligence agencies do to keep us safe, and I commend her for the work she did following the terrorist attacks last year to set in train action to ensure that we continue to give those services the support they need to continue to keep us safe.

Q6. [905097] **Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister's new Home Secretary says that her "hostile environment"

"does not represent our values as a country".—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2018; Vol. 640, c. 41.]

Does she agree with him?

The Prime Minister: What my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said was that he absolutely shares the need to differentiate between legal and illegal immigrants. He also said that there was a certain phrase he was not going to use—a phrase that was first used by Labour Ministers in government. Across Government, we are clear that we are working hard to support and help those of the Windrush generation who have been caught up in this issue recently and across time, but we are also ensuring that we have a fair immigration policy which ensures that people who break the rules, play the system and try to jump ahead of others are not able to carry on being here in this country in the same way as those who play by the rules, are hard-working taxpayers and contribute to our society. That is only fair.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is only under the Conservatives that you get decision and vision? That is why Maidstone Borough Council needs to turn blue on 3 May.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If those who are taking part in council elections tomorrow and making those decisions look up and down the country, they will see that it is Conservative councils that support local communities, provide good local services and keep council tax low. The message is very clear: if that is what you want, vote Conservative tomorrow.

Q10. [905101] **Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): Ministers will today discuss the two customs arrangement proposals first put forward last August. The first is untried and untested. The second relies on unproven technology. In any event, neither will be ready by the time they are needed, and both have been written off in Europe. Why, with just six months to go before a draft Brexit deal is signed off, are the Government still considering options that we all know are not feasible?

The Prime Minister: We are very clear that we are going to leave the European Union on 29 March 2019. We will be leaving the customs union, and we want to ensure that we can have an independent trade policy. We also want to ensure that we deliver—we are committed to delivering—on our commitment to having no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and that we have as frictionless trade as possible with the European Union. There are a number of ways in which that can be delivered—[*Interruption.*] There are a number of ways in which that can be delivered, and if the hon. Lady is so interested in the whole question of a customs border, she might like to ask her Front Benchers to come to a decision on what the Labour party policy actually is on this.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The European Scrutiny Committee, which I have the honour to chair, has invited Mr Olly Robbins to appear before the Committee on several occasions since February, but so far this has not been arranged. Will my right hon. Friend be good enough to use her charm to ensure that Mr Robbins does appear, as have already the Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and Sir Tim Barrow?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will know, it is not normally the case that any request to a civil servant to appear before a Committee is automatically accepted; decisions are taken about the levels at which civil servants should appear before Committees. As he said, he has had a number of my right hon. Friends appear before his Committee—I remember, I am not sure I can say with fond memory, the time when I appeared before the European Scrutiny Committee when I was Home Secretary—but I will certainly look at the request that he has made.

Q11. [905102] **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): The interim report of the Mental Health Act review stated that BAME men and women are more likely to come into contact with mental health services through the police, to be admitted to secure hospitals and to have poorer mental health outcomes over time. The Prime Minister has talked about ending the burning injustice of mental ill health, so why have her Government still not appointed an equalities champion to tackle these inequalities, nearly two years after that was recommended by the "Five Year Forward View for Mental Health"?

The Prime Minister: It was precisely to identify this sort of disparity in public services that I launched the race disparity audit when I became Prime Minister. In some areas that does make for uncomfortable reading for our society, but it is absolutely right that we have done it and it is absolutely right that we then address the issues that it has raised.

The hon. Lady talks about the interaction of people with mental health problems and the police. This is not something that I waited to do something about until the race disparity audit; I did something about it when I was Home Secretary. We have significantly reduced the number of people with mental health problems who are being taken to a cell in a police station as a place of refuge, and we have ensured that there is health support available for the police. As a result, people who are in a mental health crisis are getting better treatment than they did previously. There is more to do, but we have already started to take action.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The hopes of the 464 survivors of thalidomide in the United Kingdom, the Thalidomide Trust and the all-party group on thalidomide, which I chair, were significantly depressed at the weekend when we saw the media coverage, particularly in *The Sunday Times*, suggesting that the German Government are seeking to resile from their verbal pledge to make good the promise to compensate the UK survivors whose mothers were prescribed and took the German-manufactured drug thalidomide. Their lives are shortening, and they need support. Will my right hon. Friend use her good offices to augment the work of the Foreign Office in making the case for UK thalidomide survivors to the German Government so that they can finally get the justice they have for too long been denied?

The Prime Minister: I fully recognise why the survivors of thalidomide were so concerned at the reports that they saw because, although back in 2012 the Department of Health announced an £80 million grant for thalidomide survivors, they of course have been able and are able to apply to the German Contergan Foundation for Disabled Persons for funds. In relation to the particular point my hon. Friend has raised, I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and the Americas met representatives of the Thalidomide Trust towards the end of last year to discuss this. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is remaining in contact with the trust, and it is pursuing its discussions with the German Government on this point.

Q12. [905103] **Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): When one of my constituents had a heart attack, he waited an hour and 20 minutes for a paramedic and two hours for an ambulance, because they were having to queue up at local hospitals. He never made it back home. Faced with such a human tragedy, does the Prime Minister feel any pang of conscience for the shambles she has created in our NHS?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady sets out what is obviously a very sad and tragic case in relation to her constituent. I am happy to look at the background of what led to that particular outcome. We all want to make sure that patients are able to be treated in the NHS when they need that treatment, and get the appropriate treatment. That is why we have been putting extra money into the NHS, but, as I say, it is a very sad case that she has outlined, and I am happy to look at the details of it.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): As voters go to the polls tomorrow, could the Prime Minister confirm that a green future is at the heart of our local government policies? Would she agree to meet

me and others to look at our aspiration for the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty to become a national park so that we can increase the opportunities afforded for open-air recreation on London's doorstep?

The Prime Minister: We are protecting our natural environment. We want to leave a cleaner, greener Britain for our children. That is not just something that Conservatives in national Government want to do; it is what Conservatives in local government want to do as well. That is why we launched our 25-year environment plan. I know the beauty of the Chilterns; I enjoy walking in the Chilterns, and I am happy to meet my right hon. Friend and others to discuss her proposal.

Q13. [905104] **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Can the Prime Minister confirm that every UK Government Department has budgeted for a derisory 1% pay rise for all its civil servants? Is it fair that workers who collect tax, and who try to make a broken social security system and a broken immigration system work, are getting a real-terms pay cut and are still subjected to a public sector pay cap?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have been very clear that the blanket 1% cap that has taken place over recent years on public sector pay is not an approach that we are taking in the future. Obviously, Departments are funded at a certain level, and it is for Departments then to come forward with their proposals in relation to pay within their Department.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): Today, council tax, on average, costs less in real terms than it did in 2010. Under 13 years of Labour in government, council tax doubled. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the council tax referendum principles that this Government have put in place have been a resounding success?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the facts that he has set out in relation to council tax. That is a result of decisions that have been taken by the Government to have that council tax referendum in place and of Conservative councils actually making decisions to freeze or to lower council tax, or to ensure that it is kept lower than in Labour councils. Conservative councils, on average, cost a typical family £100 less in council tax than councils run by other parties. That is important, and the Government have played their part with the council tax referendum.

Q15. [905106] **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): Since first being elected in 2015, I have consistently campaigned to protect hundreds of jobs at risk in Dundee from being lost through the shoddy restructuring of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. I was finally given a written guarantee that these jobs would be transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions. However, I have since learned, without explanation, that this is no longer to be the case. Will the Prime Minister personally intervene to reverse this reckless U-turn and betrayal by taking charge to save each and every one of these 479 highly skilled jobs, without which there will be a devastating impact on the staff, their families and my city?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has raised an issue I have not seen the details of, but I will ensure that my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions look at the issue he has raised.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): This afternoon, the Treasury Committee will take evidence from TSB about the recent IT failures, which have left thousands of customers unable to access their accounts and unable to pay their bills, with some very severe consequences. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a robust and reliable banking IT infrastructure is essential in the modern economy? These failures are unfair to businesses that cannot pay in their takings, they are unfair to vulnerable customers, and they are particularly unfair when many banks are still closing branches.

The Prime Minister: I agree that a robust, safe and reliable IT system is essential to underpinning today's world of modern banking. I am sure that my right hon. Friend and the Treasury Committee will ensure, through the evidence they take, that they get to the bottom of what happened in TSB.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): Last Saturday night, an 83-year-old woman had a fall at home and was bleeding from a head wound. She waited for an ambulance for nearly three hours. Will the Prime Minister apologise to my constituent and promise the rest of the country that no one else's elderly mum will suffer like that?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady would like to provide more expansive details, I know the Secretary of State for Health will look very closely into the case that she identifies. I am sorry to hear of the circumstances of her constituent, but we will look into the case.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Last night at 9.08 pm, two men were shot outside Queensbury station on the edge of my constituency. One is dead and the other is in a critical condition. Queensbury station is an important transport hub for the people of Harrow East and Brent North. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the police for their prompt action in securing the area and for the messages of reassurance they are giving to the community today? Will she also take every necessary step to remove guns and knives from society to prevent reoccurrence?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the importance that is attached to Queensbury station, and I join my hon. Friend in commending the actions of the police and emergency services in response to this and other such incidents. He is right on the importance of dealing with offensive weapons, which is why we announced, under my right hon. Friend the previous Home Secretary and taken forward by the current Home Secretary, plans to introduce an offensive weapons Bill. It is why we launched the serious violence strategy and the serious violence taskforce, which brings Ministers and representatives from across this House together with police and others to deal with this issue. It has met for the first time and it will continue to meet to address this important issue.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. Points of order come after statements, as I think the hon. Gentleman knows. He has been in the House for quite a while now. We look forward to hearing from him later.

Breast Cancer Screening

12.48 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I wish to inform the House of a serious failure that has come to light in the national breast screening programme in England.

The NHS breast screening programme is overseen by Public Health England and is one of the most comprehensive in the world. It screens 2 million people every year, with women between the ages of 50 and 70 receiving a screen every three years up to their 71st birthday. However, earlier this year PHE analysis of trial data from the service found that there was a computer algorithm failure dating back to 2009. The latest estimates I have received from PHE is that, as a result, between 2009 and the start of 2018, an estimated 450,000 women aged between 68 and 71 were not invited to their final breast screening.

At this stage, it is unclear whether any delay in diagnosis will have resulted in any avoidable harm or death, and that is one of the reasons I am ordering an independent review to establish the clinical impact. Our current best estimate—which comes with caveats, as it is based on statistical modelling rather than on patient reviews, and because there is currently no clinical consensus about the benefits of screening for this age group—is that there may be between 135 and 270 women who have had their lives shortened as a result. I am advised that it is unlikely to be more than this range and may be considerably less. However, tragically, there are likely to be some people in this group who would have been alive today if the failure had not happened.

The issue came to light because an upgrade to the breast screening invitation IT system provided improved data to local services on the actual ages of the women receiving screening invitations. This highlighted that some women on the AgeX trial, set up to examine whether women up to the age of 73 could benefit from screening, were not receiving an invitation to their final screen as a 70-year-old. Further analysis of the data quantified the problem and has found a number of linked causes, including issues with the system's IT and how age parameters are programmed into it. The investigation also found variations in how local services send out invitations to women in different parts of the country.

The existence of a potential issue was brought to the attention of the Department of Health and Social Care by Public Health England in January, although at that stage, its advice was that the risk to patients was limited. Following that, an urgent clinical evaluation took place to determine the extent of harm and the remedial measures necessary. Public Health England escalated the matter to Ministers in March, with clear clinical advice that the matter should not be made public. This was to ensure that a plan could be put in place that ensured any remedies did not overwhelm the existing screening programme and was able to offer proper support for affected patients.

I am now taking the earliest opportunity to update the House on all the remedial measures that have been put in place, which are as follows. First, urgent remedial work to stop the failure continuing has now been completed

according to the chief executive of Public Health England. This was finished by 1 April and PHE is clear that the issue is not now affecting any women going forward.

Of the estimated 450,000 women who missed invitations to a scan, 309,000 are estimated to still be alive. Our intention is to contact all those living within the United Kingdom who are registered with a GP before the end of May, with the first 65,000 letters going out this week. Following independent expert clinical advice, the letters will inform all those under 72 that they will automatically be sent an invitation to a catch-up screening. Those aged 72 and over will be given access to a helpline through which they can get clinical advice to help them decide whether a screening is appropriate for their particular situation. This is because for older women, there is a significant risk that screening will pick up non-threatening cancers that may lead to unnecessary and harmful tests and treatment. However, this is an individual choice and in all cases, the wishes of the patients affected will be followed. By sending all the letters to UK residents registered with a GP by the end of May, we hope to reassure anyone who does not receive a letter this month that they are not likely to have been affected.

It is a major priority to do our very best to make sure that the additional scans do not cause any delays in the regular breast screening programme for those under 71, so NHS England has taken major steps to expand the capacity of screening services, and has today confirmed that all women affected who wish to be screened will receive an appointment within the next six months. Of course, we intend the vast majority to be much sooner than that.

We have held helpful discussions with the devolved Administrations to alert them to the issue. Scotland uses a different IT system, and while the systems in Wales and Northern Ireland are similar, neither believe they are affected. However, we are discussing with each of them the best way to reach women who have moved to another part of the UK during this period. This is obviously more complicated, but we are confident that those affected will still be contacted by the end of May.

In addition, and as soon as possible, we will make our best endeavours to contact the appropriate next of kin of those we believe missed a scan and have subsequently died of breast cancer. As well as apologising to the families affected, we would wish to offer any further advice they might find helpful, including the process by which we can establish whether the missed scan is a likely cause of death and compensation is therefore payable. We recognise that this will be incredibly distressing for some families, and we will approach the issue as sensitively as possible.

Irrespective of when the incident started, the fact is that for many years, oversight of our screening programme has not been good enough. Many families will be deeply disturbed by these revelations, not least because there will be some people who receive a letter having had a recent diagnosis of breast cancer. We must also recognise that there may be some who receive a letter having had a recent terminal diagnosis. For them and others, it is incredibly upsetting to know that you did not receive an invitation for screening at the correct time, and totally devastating to hear you may have lost or be about to lose a loved one because of administrative incompetence. So on behalf of the Government, Public Health England

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

and the NHS, I apologise wholeheartedly and unreservedly for the suffering caused. But words alone are not enough. We also need to get to the bottom of precisely how many people were affected, why it actually happened and most importantly, how we can prevent it ever happening again.

Many in this House will also have legitimate questions that need answering: why did the algorithm failure occur in the first place, and how can we guarantee it does not happen again? Why did quality assurance processes not pick up the problem over a decade or more? Were there any warnings, written or otherwise, which should have been heeded earlier? Was the issue escalated to Ministers at the appropriate time? What are the broader patient safety lessons for screening IT systems?

I am therefore commissioning an independent review of the NHS breast screening programme to look at these and other issues, including its processes, IT systems and further changes and improvements that can be made to the system to minimise the risk of any repetition. The review will be chaired by Lynda Thomas, chief executive of Macmillan Cancer Support, and Professor Martin Gore, consultant medical oncologist and professor of cancer medicine at the Royal Marsden, and is expected to report in six months.

The NHS has made huge progress under Governments of both sides of this House on improving cancer survival rates, which are now at their highest ever. Seven thousand people are alive today who would not have been if mortality rates had remained unchanged from 2010, but this progress makes system failures even more heartbreaking when they happen. Today, everyone in this House will be thinking of families up and down the country who are worried that they may have been affected by this failure. We cannot give all the answers today, but we can commit to take all the necessary steps to give people the information that they need as quickly as possible. Most of all, we want to be able to promise that this will not happen again, so today, the whole House will be united in our resolve to be transparent about what went wrong and to take the necessary actions to learn from the mistakes made. I commend this statement to the House.

12.58 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement and for his personal courtesy in directly briefing me as well. The thoughts of the whole House are with those whose screening was missed and who sadly lost their lives from breast cancer, or who have subsequently developed cancer. Anyone who has had a loved one taken by breast cancer, or indeed any cancer, will know of the great pain and anguish of that loss. I understand that the Secretary of State has referred to estimates, but when the facts are established, will he assure us that each and every case will be looked into sensitively and in a timely manner? Our thoughts also turn to the 450,000 women who were not offered the screening that they should have had, so I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to contact the 309,000 women who are estimated to be still alive.

Early detection and treatment are vital to reducing breast cancer mortality rates, which was why the AgeX pilots were established in 2009 and rolled out nationally

from late 2010, when the Government expanded the screening programme. Given the problems that Public Health England has identified with its randomisation algorithm for those trials, will the Secretary of State tell us whether any evaluations and assessments of those pilots had been done by the Department before the national roll-out of the programme?

I welcome the Secretary of State's candour in questioning why this problem was not picked up—eight years is a long time for an error of this magnitude to go undetected. Did the Department receive any warnings in that time? Is there any record of how many women raised concerns that they had not received the appropriate screening? Were there any missed opportunities to correct this mistake? He said graciously that oversight of the screening programme was not good enough. How does he intend to improve that oversight? What other trials are in place across the NHS and is he satisfied with their oversight?

We welcome the establishment of the national inquiry. Will it be hosted and staffed by the Department of Health or another Department? In the interests of transparency, will the Secretary of State place in the Library the Public Health England analysis from this year that identified the problem with the algorithm? Although the parallels are not exact, where the NHS offers bowel cancer screenings for women between the ages of 60 and 74 and cervical cancer screenings for women up to 64, what assurances can he give that the systems supporting those services are running properly, and what checks are being carried out to make sure that nobody misses out on screenings for other cancers?

The Secretary of State says that NHS England will take steps to expand the capacity of screening services. Will he say a little more about that? What extra resources will be made available to help the NHS provide the extra screening now needed? He will know that the NHS faces huge workforce pressures—according to Macmillan, there are more than 400 vacancies in cancer nursing, the Royal College of Radiologists has found that 25% of NHS breast screening programme units are understaffed, and there are vacancies for radiographers too. Will he assure us that the NHS will have the staff to carry out this extra work, and may I gently suggest that, if it needs extra international cancer staff, he ensures that the Home Office does not block their visas?

More broadly, does the Secretary of State share my concerns that screening rates are falling generally? The proportion of women aged 50 to 70 taking up routine breast screening invitations fell to 71.1% last year—the lowest rate in the last decade. There is also a wide regional variation in screening rates. The number of women attending breast screening in England is as low as 55.4% in some areas, and, as the all-party group on breast cancer found, there are stark inequalities in NHS services in England, with women in the worst-affected areas more than twice as likely to die from breast cancer under the age of 75. Beyond the problems identified today, what more are the Government doing to make sure that screening rates rise again so that cancer care for patients is the best it can be?

Finally, many of our constituents over whom breast cancer has cast a shadow will feel anxious and worried tonight. Members on both sides of the House want to see cancer prevented and those who have it fully supported. Transparency and clarity are vital. Will the Secretary

of State undertake to keep the House fully informed of developments to offer our constituents the peace of mind they deserve?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his constructive tone, and I want to reassure him that each and every case will be looked at in detail. The sad truth is that we cannot establish whether not being invited to a screen might have been critical for someone without looking at their individual case notes, and in some cases, sadly, establishing a link will mean looking at the medical case notes of someone who has died.

It is important to explain that the reason for these estimates, which are much broader than we would like, is that there is no clinical consensus about the efficacy of breast screening for older women. As I understand it, that is because the incidences of cancers among older women are higher, but a higher proportion of them are not malignant or life-threatening, which makes it particularly difficult. It is also the case that breast cancer treatment has improved dramatically in recent years and so it is less important than it was to pick up breast cancer early. None the less, we believe it will have made a difference to some women, which is why it is such a serious issue.

The evaluations of the AgeX trial, which brought this to light at the start of the year, have been continued by Oxford University throughout the trial period. I am not aware of any evaluations shared with the Department that could have brought this problem to light, but obviously the inquiry will look into that. We need to find ways to improve oversight, and modern IT systems can greatly improve safety and reliability—in fact it was during the upgrading of the IT system that this problem was brought to light.

I will share with the hon. Gentleman the advice the Department received from Public Health England in January, which was the first time we were alerted to the issue, and we will certainly provide any extra resources the NHS needs to undertake additional cancer screening. One of our biggest priorities is that women between the ages of 50 and 70, when the screens are of their highest clinical value, do not find their regular screens delayed by the extra screening we do to put this problem right. He is right that one thing that has come to light is the regional variation in how the programme is operated. It was previously operated by the old primary care trusts, under the supervision of strategic health authorities, and then brought under the remit of Public Health England, but the regional variations have continued for a long time, so this problem will be worse in some parts of the country than in others. I undertake to keep the House fully informed.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the commitments and actions he has set out. Colleagues across the House will be thinking of the hundreds of thousands of women not called for their final screening test. They now need consistent, high-quality, evidence-based guidance so that they can make an informed choice about whether to take up the offer of screening. There is much material available setting out pictorially and clearly how they can weigh up the risks and benefits. Will he assure the House not only that a helpline will be in place but that it will be backed up with high-quality material available directly to patients and their GPs, many of whom will be directly counselling women following this news?

Mr Hunt: Yes, and I can reassure my hon. Friend that GPs will be briefed and that people will be referred for additional support to clinically trained staff at Macmillan Cancer Support and Breast Cancer Care. We have to be transparent with patients, however, about the absence of a clear clinical consensus on the efficacy of scanning for women in their 70s. The fairest thing is to explain that different people have different views and allow them to come to an individual choice, and that is what we are doing. It will of course cause considerable distress to those given that dilemma, but if anyone wants a scan, we will do that scan.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for my advance briefing, but, as a breast surgeon and co-chair of the all-party group on breast cancer, I gently take issue with his comment that we do not need to diagnose breast cancer early because of the changes in treatment. I would not like that message to stand: diagnosing early is still crucial.

Obviously this is horrendous for the women involved, but it will also create anxiety for women who are not aware whether they are involved and who might not have been part of the trial. Reassuring them will be a challenge. I welcome the independent review into how it happened and how it went so long without being picked up, and I am interested to know what will happen with the trial now—the loss of almost 500,000 women from it might have a major impact.

Given the normal pick-up rate of breast screening, approximately 2,500 cancers would have been picked up across England in the last round. As the Secretary of State says, this issue did not apply in Scotland, but some of the women affected might have moved and settled in Scotland, so when did he inform the Scottish Government?

The Secretary of State said that the Department knew in January. As far as I can establish, officers in Scotland were informed of a minor issue in March, were told only last week that it was actually more major, and were not told that it might affect women who now live in Scotland. There has clearly been preparation and talk about funding in England, but how many women who live in Scotland have been identified, and what efforts have been made to track them down? What preparations for funding or the expansion of services have been made for Scotland and, indeed, for the other devolved nations?

As was mentioned by the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), radiology, and particularly breast radiology, is a huge shortage specialty. What funds will be provided to ensure that it can be delivered without messing up the normal system?

Will women who do not receive a letter in the next few weeks be able to telephone, or can the Secretary of State really guarantee that if they have not heard by the end of the month, they are clear? As a doctor, I find that a bit scary.

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady has asked some important questions. I am sorry if what I said was not clear, but I do not think I said that there was no need to diagnose early. It is obviously incredibly important for cancer to be diagnosed as early as possible. What I said was that I had been advised that in many cases, because of advances in breast cancer treatment, it would not make a difference

[Mr Hunt]

to the particular women affected in this case. I fully accept that in some cases it will, and of course it is very important to diagnose all cancers as early as possible.

I will find out from Oxford University the dates on which it expects to report the full outcome of the AgeX trial. Obviously we all want to hear the results as soon as possible. I will also inform the hon. Lady of the exact date on which Scottish Government officials were informed. Let me reassure her that if there are any additional costs to the Scottish health system, it will of course be recompensed.

We do not think that major pressures will be created in the Scottish screening programme, and we are confident that we will be able to contact everyone in the UK who is registered with a GP—whether in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or England—by the end of May. We have had very productive discussions with Scottish officials about the IT exchange that will be necessary to ensure that women living in Scotland also receive their letters by the end of May. We cannot guarantee that every single one of them will have been contacted by then—some will have moved abroad, and some will not be registered with a GP for whatever reason—but we think that we can contact the vast majority, and the helpline will be open for anyone to call if they think they may have been affected.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I think that Members on both sides of the House have appreciated the measured way in which my right hon. Friend has come to the House and revealed detailed commitments to helping the women who have suffered as a result of this terrible, unfortunate IT event. I also think that the measured response from the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) properly reflected the concern that everyone shares.

My right hon. Friend referred to additional screening capacity to ensure that there is no impact on other, younger women. What undertakings can he give to any women who have been affected, and who find that they are suffering from a malignant growth in their breast, that they will be able to receive the appropriate treatment as rapidly as possible?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for the work that he did on cancer when he was working at the Department of Health, and for his broader work in supporting the hospital sector. He is absolutely right: additional people will come forward for treatment, so one of the other matters that we have been looking into is our treatment capacity. We certainly intend to ensure that people are treated within the normal short period if a cancer is detected, and the first step in that process is to ensure that everyone has a scan in the next six months. During that period, we will make certain that they are able to look forward to the same rapid treatment that all other people whose cancers are detected can be confident of receiving.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): We have an ethical duty to get screening right, because we are inviting well people into our health service and offering them an intervention. May I ask the Secretary of State whether the uptake of screening by 68 to 71-year-olds

during the period concerned was any lower than expected? If it was less than expected, why was that not properly analysed?

Mr Hunt: I do not know the answer to that question, but I will look into it. If we find that the uptake was lower than expected in that age group, it will be a very important clue about something that may have gone wrong, and I am sure that the review panel will want to examine it. The overall uptake rate is about 80%, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should look into what the rates were in specific age cohorts.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his measured statement, and for all he is doing to ensure that the women affected are given the treatment and support that they need. I particularly welcome his independent review of the NHS screening programme. Will he also be looking at quality assurance programmes more widely within the NHS in relation to screening programmes? It is deeply worrying that the NHS did not identify this error for more than a decade, and there may be a need to review those programmes.

Mr Hunt: I am afraid that my right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The truth is that we do have a quality assurance programme, and it failed to pick up this problem for far too long. We need to understand why that happened. We think that a single IT mistake was made at the very start of the programme, and we understand that sometimes such mistakes are devilishly difficult to identify. None the less, as was suggested by the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams), there must have been clues that could have been picked up—or so one would think—and we need to get to the bottom of that.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I think that anyone who listened to the statement will be devastated and appalled to learn about this fatal failure, especially given that the UK's breast cancer survival rate is below the EU average. The Secretary of State talked about the advice line that might be available to people who had been affected, but has he given any consideration to any emotional or mental health support that should be extended to those people and their families?

Mr Hunt: We are indeed talking to the charities operating in this sector about how we can best provide all kinds of support, including mental health support, as well as clinical guidance. We often talk in the House about the challenges facing the NHS, but it is important to note that breast cancer is an area in which survival rates have been improving, and have actually been catching up with those in other European countries. The NHS deserves great credit for that, despite today's very serious failing.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for the way in which he brought this very bad news to the House, and the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) for the way in which he responded to it.

As my right hon. Friend will know, breast cancer is not just about survival nowadays; it is also about quality of life after treatment. Will his contact with those who have been affected extend to those who have been

treated, but who may have had to be treated in a more radical way than might have been the case had their cancers been picked up earlier?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. As my hon. Friend will know from his own medical background, it is impossible to know that until there is a detailed case note review, but we will certainly undertake that review for anyone who thinks they may have been affected.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and for the work he is doing to ensure that women who are affected are supported and treated promptly, but what is he doing to ensure that people who are due for cervical and other NHS screening programmes are being properly called, and can he tell women who are affected—and, no doubt, very worried today—what they should do now? Whom should they call, should they be waiting for a letter, and how soon can they expect a scan if they wish to have one?

Mr Hunt: According to the advice that I have received so far, there is no read-across to other screening programmes, but obviously the independent review panel will look into that as it seeks to examine all aspects of the issue. We have made the commitment today that we will invite for scans all those who either should be scanned or should consider whether they wish to have a scan, and will offer them a date before the end of October, although we hope that in the vast majority of cases it will be much sooner than that.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): What conversations has the Secretary of State had with the Welsh Secretary? Having long since passed the ages he mentioned, I certainly was never invited for a screening; I had to ask for one, and I eventually got the screening in England.

Mr Hunt: We have not had conversations at ministerial level, but we have had conversations at official level. The Welsh Administration do not believe this problem has affected them, even though Wales was using the same IT system we were using in England. Our concern is about people living in England who are registered with a Welsh GP or people living in Wales registered with an English GP. That is why we are having constructive discussions to share IT information and make sure everyone in England or Wales registered with a GP will get that letter.

To respond to the earlier question about what people should do now, anyone is free to call the helpline number, which will be made public today, but we are hoping to get the letters out as quickly as possible over the next four weeks, during the month of May, so that everyone can be pretty confident that they are okay if they have not received one of those letters.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement today that there will be an independent review; it is important that women have confidence in the screening programme. As someone who worked in breast cancer for over 10 years before being elected, I gently say to women that the screening mammogram is just one tool in the early detection of breast cancer and that if they notice a change in the interval of three years between mammograms they

must seek medical advice. Also, not all mammograms pick up breast cancers, so they must not just rely on screening mammograms.

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for her excellent advice, which gives me the opportunity to repeat that the advice for women about looking after their breasts and making sure they are alert to potential breast cancer remains unchanged. All women should take great care over this and should always come forward to see their GP or local cancer service if they have any concerns or doubts.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. There is no other way to describe what has happened than utterly, utterly heart-breaking, and it is hard to imagine what some of the worst affected families will be going through over the next few weeks.

I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his assurance that capacity will be expanded to ensure that women can now access screening, but unless he puts further resources into the system, other people will go to the back of the queue as a consequence. In my region of the north-west, one in five posts are currently vacant, and for far too many women in this country where they live currently determines whether they live or die. So will the Secretary of State put in the additional resources needed to make sure all women can get the screening they need when they need it?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. We have many other occasions to have a broader discussion about resourcing of the NHS, but I recognise what she says: in the specific situation we are in now, with the people who will need additional scans and additional treatments over and above what the NHS would have otherwise done, we will need to find additional resources to make sure others are not disadvantaged.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): May I add my words of support to the Secretary of State for the way he has approached this issue, and to Opposition Members for their approach too?

On the scope of the independent review, will it look at other screening programmes? It might be the case that this particular issue is not replicated, but I think people will want assurances about other screening programmes. Also, as the NHS looks to use IT as a powerful way to combat illness and disease, will the Secretary of State make sure that appropriate checks are in place so that there are proper assurances in the system and these kinds of problems do not arise in the future?

Mr Hunt: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I assure him that the review being done by Lynda Thomas, one of the most senior cancer campaigners in the country, and Professor Gore, one of the most senior oncologists in the country, will look at what lessons can be learned for the entire cancer programme, and not just at the specific issue of why this particular IT problem occurred.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The statement the Secretary of State has made today is truly shocking, and many women and their families will be very worried this afternoon. The Secretary of State

[Diana Johnson]

said that it is estimated that 309,000 women in this group are still alive and that the first 65,000 letters are going out this week. Why are the letters not going out this afternoon to all 309,000 women? Why are we having to wait until the end of May to put at rest the minds of these women and their families?

Mr Hunt: That is a reasonable question, and I assure the hon. Lady that we are sending these letters out as quickly as we possibly can, but we felt that, even though we are not able to send them all out this afternoon—for example, because we have to reconcile with the clinical databases in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for women who have moved to those areas and that is going to take place later this month—it was important to come to the House as soon as possible, without delay, to inform Members that this was happening. There will be a period of a few weeks during which people will have to wait to see if they get one of the letters, and we fully appreciate that that will cause a lot of worry to the women involved.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): This is a good time to pay tribute to all the excellent cancer support charities, counselling services, Maggie's centres and so forth up and down the country. I am reassured that the Secretary of State has said he will be working with them, but will he commit this afternoon to contacting all these charities proactively and providing them with the resources they need to meet what will obviously be an increased demand over the coming weeks and months?

Mr Hunt: That is a good point, and we will get in touch with all the cancer charities that we think are going to be affected by what has happened and make sure they have the support they need.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): When did the Secretary of State or the Minister with direct responsibility for screening last ask their officials about the accuracy of the screening programme and the robustness of the checks and assurances in place to ensure it was working properly and efficiently? When, before January this year, did he last ask his officials that?

Mr Hunt: I will have to get back to the hon. Gentleman with a detailed answer to that question. Ministers were informed of this issue in March, and we are responsible, as Ministers, for the effective functioning of that system—in the way all Ministers have responsibility for their various areas—so one of the questions we need to ask is whether the right escalation procedures and checks and balances were in place so that Ministers could be informed if there was likely to be a problem.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): My constituency has many breast cancer sufferers who were victims of the rogue surgeon Mr Paterson, so I thank my right hon. Friend for setting up an inquiry chaired by the Bishop of Norwich, in which victims feel properly listened to, and, most importantly, are being compensated. Will any of the women caught up in this current situation who might have been harmed be eligible for compensation?

Mr Hunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for suggesting the Bishop of Norwich as a good person to help in the Paterson review, and the answer to her question is yes:

if, because of a failing by the NHS, harm has happened, people will be eligible for compensation, and we will do all the necessary work to establish whether that is the case.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Breast cancer screening makes a real difference to outcomes for breast cancer patients by diagnosing early, so I applaud the Secretary of State for saying he will look at ways of improving performance in this area across the country, but what is he going to do to try to make women who have moved out of the UK who might be affected aware of what has happened?

Mr Hunt: We will look at whether we are able to get in contact with people and will get in contact whenever we can, but there is of course a helpline through which anyone can contact us. It is also important to say that, according to the advice I have received, missing the final screening will in many cases not make a difference to a patient's cancer or the treatment they receive, but we will do everything we can to support everyone who thinks they might have been affected.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): While it will be for the review to investigate and report on why the fault with the algorithm was not discovered earlier, can the Secretary of State throw any more light on the circumstances in which it eventually came to be discovered? He said, for example, that it was in the course of a computer upgrade. Obviously, the circumstances that led to its discovery could be a pointer towards greater safeguards for the future.

Mr Hunt: That is a very good point. The original issue—or the original potential issue—was identified by people working on the AgeX trial for Oxford University, who then brought it to the attention of Public Health England in early January. One of the issues seems to have been the confusion about whether the scans stopped when someone turned 70 or whether they should carry on until their 71st birthday. That is why we think the original coding error happened, but obviously this is a matter for the review, and we need to learn everything from it.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): This is a hugely upsetting and serious issue, and I commend the Secretary of State for the great compassion and sensitivity with which he has delivered this very bad news for women throughout the United Kingdom. He mentioned the fact that the Northern Ireland breast screening scheme was slightly different, but he will appreciate that he absolutely must say more to reassure women in Northern Ireland at this time because we have no Health Minister. May we please have more reassurance for women in Northern Ireland?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Lady for making that fair and important point. I will make a special effort in the case of Northern Ireland to understand what the situation is and to ensure that it is publicised to the people of Northern Ireland. Absent politicians are able to do that.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I also thank the Secretary of State for his measured and sensitive tone in delivering this afternoon's statement. He mentioned that the figures of 450,000 and 309,000

were estimates. What is not an estimate, however, is that 65,000 letters will be going out at the end of this month. Will he assure us that his team in the Department will write to Members of Parliament to indicate the number of women affected in each constituency, so that we can prepare for the inevitable contacts that constituents will make with us?

Mr Hunt: I am very happy to make that commitment.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I hope that the independent review will investigate this, but is the Secretary of State aware of any instances of GPs inquiring why patients who should have had a final breast screen were not invited to have one?

Mr Hunt: That is a very good question. I am not aware of any such instances, but that is exactly what we want to look at in the review. It does seem strange that people who were expecting to be invited did not come forward, and that their not receiving an invitation did not set any hares running. That is one of the things that we need to look at.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): How many cancers are detected for every 10,000 screenings, and what is the clinical consensus on the effectiveness of that?

Mr Hunt: My right hon. Friend is testing my clinical knowledge here; there will be other people in the Chamber who are better able to answer that question. I am ready to be corrected by eminent experts on this, but my understanding is that, in relation to women in their 70s, for every 1,000 women there are around 12 cancers, and of those 12 cancers, around three are potentially life-threatening.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): Let us be clear that this is an utterly desperate situation. We know that some women may well have died who might not have done had they been identified. However, I would like to pay tribute to the Secretary of State's statement. It was transparent, it 'fessed up and it made clear what the Department of Health and Social Care will be doing to remedy the situation. I appreciate that. What will the Department do to raise awareness of breast cancer screening among women who are not currently registered with a GP?

Mr Hunt: That is an important question. We have the Be Clear on Cancer campaign, which is a national advertising campaign but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) said, it is important for people to recognise that, if we are going to protect them from cancer, they will have to take an active and proactive role in detecting any cancers they might have. Important though the screening service might be, they cannot rely on the screening service, because their own experience of how their own body is functioning is the most important detection method of all.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, and for the urgency and sensitivity with which he is treating this issue. Women all over the country will be very anxious

at hearing this news. Will he guarantee that all women who did not get invited for their scan will now be guaranteed their screening?

Mr Hunt: We are absolutely guaranteeing that all women affected who are still alive will be invited to have a screening if they want it. Only those under 72 will automatically be sent a date and time for their screening. Those over 72 will be invited to talk to the helpline so that they can form a judgment as to whether a screening is appropriate, but anyone who wants one will get one.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I should like to thank the Secretary of State for his comprehensive response. Can he advise me how many women who have moved to Scotland might be affected? If not, will he work double time to ensure that those who have been affected and who have moved to Scotland will get their letters timeously within the correct period?

Mr Hunt: I believe that the IT work, which is a collaboration between the Scottish NHS and the English NHS, will be completed in the week of 15 May. That is why we are confident that we will be able to get the letters out to people registered with Scottish GPs who have moved from England by the end of May, which is the same timescale as for getting the letters out to people living in England. We will then know that number, and I will of course let the hon. Lady know.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): My grandmother died of breast cancer a few years ago, and my heart goes out to all women affected by this fatal IT malfunction. I welcome my right hon. Friend's assurance that he is going to do everything he possibly can to ensure that this does not happen again. Has any consideration been given to the impact of this on GP surgeries? I expect that, during the next few days while women wait for their letters, they might make appointments with their GPs in anticipation, and in fear.

Mr Hunt: Yes, we are briefing all GP surgeries and all GPs about what the appropriate response is, because we recognise that that might happen. Of course, GPs are there for people to talk to at any time if they have concerns, and some people may choose to do that. We have also set up a specialist helpline that will be open seven days a week from 8 am to 8 pm, where people will be able to get advice straightaway by picking up the phone. We think that that will be the most practical option for most people.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. As colleagues know, I like to call everyone on statements, and I do not wish to make an exception today, but I remind the House that we also have a ten-minute rule motion and a very heavily subscribed Opposition day debate. In pledging to try to get all remaining colleagues in, I ask them to do us all the great favour of being extremely brief. I am sure that Mr Shannon has in mind just a short sentence without any preamble or subordinate clauses.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for his compassion and care. Is he aware of any discussions on the continued alignment with the European Medicines Agency's drug licensing process to ensure that our breast cancer patients,

[*Jim Shannon*]

and indeed all cancer patients, have access to the benefits of the European trials and UK citizens are able to participate in clinical trials? This is very important.

Mr Hunt: That is a slightly different topic, but we have no greater priority than to ensure that Brexit does not interrupt the cancer care of UK patients.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) will be a master of the pithy question because he was educated magnificently in my own constituency.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): And I am very proud to have been.

The Secretary of State knows well and cares deeply about safety matters. As he also knows, I have spent too much of my time with the clinicians in the cancer centres of Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. Will the review perhaps look at administrative and back-office resources and at whether they play any part in improving survival rates?

Mr Hunt: The whole House is thinking of my hon. Friend who, like many people in this country, is going through a huge amount of personal pressure as cancer strikes close to home. He is right that back-office systems are often poor when it comes to contacting patients, which is in contrast to the superb clinical care that we are usually able to offer, so we will absolutely consider that as part of the review.

Mr Speaker: I wish the hon. Gentleman well in the period ahead. I was not aware of those personal circumstances, but the whole House will wish his nearest and dearest all the best.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): As I understand it, Public Health England, which is of course operationally independent of Ministers, runs the screening programme, so what assurances have the chair and chief executive of that important organisation given my right hon. Friend that the actions that he has usefully set out today will be completed within the required deadlines to meet the obvious and legitimate demands of patients?

Mr Hunt: PHE has given clear assurances that the problem has been fixed, but it is open to any suggestions that the review makes as to how things could have been handled better.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer, I know that his Department takes breast cancer seriously, so the Secretary of State and the ministerial team will no doubt be as disappointed as I am that the statement was necessary today. However, will he set out what the women affected need to do and, importantly, what additional steps can be taken to reassure and support those women?

Mr Hunt: Anyone who has concerns as of today is welcome to call the helpline, but the women whom we know have been affected will be contacted by the end of the month. The first thing that many people will do is take action on receipt of a letter. If they are under 72, the letter will tell them that they will shortly be sent a date for a catch-up scan. If they are over 72, it will tell them how they can get advice as to whether that is appropriate for them.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the tone of the Secretary of State's statement, even though its contents will be devastating for many people and families across my constituency. Will he confirm what engagement there will be with groups such as local health watches and support networks to ensure that the information that he has given is relayed to them and their users?

Mr Hunt: That is a good point. I can assure my hon. Friend that the Department will be leading a big consultation exercise so that everyone is informed about how their individual organisations will be affected.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on blood cancer, I am pleased that the Secretary of State talked about the lessons that will be learned from this breast screening error. Will he assure me that what is picked up will inform future diagnostic programmes?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. That will be one of the most important things that the review does.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Tragically, it seems that the flaws were of long standing—I think the Secretary of State referred to a decade or more. Notwithstanding the length of time that has passed, will he assure the House that lessons will be learned that relate back to the procurement and design decisions that were made at the outset?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. There are basically two parts to this process. One is what the problem was with the original procurement, and the other is the problem with the assurance of the project over the time period.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I welcome the compassionate tone of the Opposition spokesman and the Secretary of State, and I particularly welcome the fact that he personally said sorry. Will he do all that he can to ensure that faith is restored in such technologies, because they do an awful lot of good when they work?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the most important ways of getting that change in mindset is by giving patients more control. Later this year, we will be offering all NHS patients an app through which they can access their medical record, and that should start to become a way in which people take control of their healthcare destiny, including such things as invitations to screenings for all cancers and many other public health measures.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): While Stockport is one of the best areas for cancer identification, there will be concern that some people may have missed a routine call for screening. Last year, my constituents in Heald

Green were particularly affected when their local breast cancer screening provision was relocated to Macclesfield District Hospital, which is over an hour away. As we address the screening issue, does my right hon. Friend agree that we must ensure that breast cancer screening is local and accessible?

Mr Hunt: We need to ensure that screening is accessible. I fully understand the concerns of my hon. Friend's constituents, and I am happy to ask the Public Health Minister to look into that issue.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): My friend Emma Agnew, a woman in her own right but also known as "Mrs Aggers" because she is married to the cricket commentator Jonathan Agnew, is one of a remarkable group of women who have faced breast cancer and beaten it, but it must be said that she had huge support from her husband, and our thoughts are also with my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). Emma had mammography last February and thought all was good, but she kept on checking her breasts. Screening is wonderful, but she checked her breasts, which was why she knew something was wrong in July. She was immediately diagnosed, she received fantastic treatment on the NHS and she is a survivor. Will the Secretary of State reiterate that we must all keep an eye out for cancer, whatever age we are?

Mr Hunt: My right hon. Friend speaks extremely wisely. We have the Touch, Look, Check campaign, and it is important that we see screening as just one important part of the battle against breast cancer, but it is no substitute for many of the other things that really matter.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and for his tone. This was clearly a failure not only of IT, but of quality assurance, so will he commission a review of quality assurance right across the health service to ensure that it is as effective as it should be?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend may well be right that we need to do that, but what I would like to do first is to see the outcome of this review, what the lessons are and

what precisely it says about the quality assurance that applied in this case, and then make a judgment about the implications for the rest of the NHS.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the genuine personal concern that he has shown today and for his determination to get to the bottom of the matter. Will he continue to keep the House and, more importantly, the public and any women affected informed as further information comes to light?

Mr Hunt: Yes, I am happy to give that assurance. The number of people affected is only an estimate at the moment, but there will obviously be great interest in the House and in the country in what the actual number ends up being.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): An additional 200,000 to 300,000 women could be seeking breast cancer screening within the next six months, which works out roughly at an additional 2,000 women a day. What reassurances can the Secretary of State give to the women who were due a screening anyway that their treatment will not be delayed as a result of the additional need?

Mr Hunt: That is an important question. One of our top priorities has been to construct a resolution to the problem that will not have an impact on the regular screening programme for women between the ages of 50 and 70, which is so important. All I can say is that a huge amount of trouble has been taken to try to ensure that we are putting additional capacity into the system to deal with the extra work.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I also welcome the compassionate tone used by hon. Members on both sides of the House today, and my thoughts are with all those affected. Will the Secretary of State reassure those in west Oxfordshire and beyond who will be concerned that this IT failure may be present in other critical systems that he will do everything possible to ensure that that is not the case?

Mr Hunt: Yes, absolutely. We are doing this review because we want to understand precisely why this happened and what the proper counter-measures are.

Points of Order

1.49 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is clear from media coverage that a former senior member of staff in this place has felt unable to speak out about serious alleged wrongdoing because of an agreement signed with the House of Commons when they left. The Women and Equalities Committee is currently investigating the way agreements can affect individuals' ability to speak out, or their perceived ability to speak out.

Mr Speaker, I understand that, as Chair of the House of Commons Commission, you are the ultimate employer of House of Commons staff. What steps will you be taking to make it clear to staff, both current and former, that they can speak out about wrongdoing experienced while working in this place? Can I ask whether you will be making a personal statement, given your involvement in these further allegations that potentially have the effect of undermining the reputation of this House?

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving notice of this point of order—I am conscious of her and her Committee's interest in the subject of non-disclosure agreements—and for giving me the opportunity to reassure her and current and former staff of the House.

Let me be clear: current and former staff are not constrained by any agreements from talking freely and confidentially to the independent inquiry into bullying and harassment, which is being conducted by Dame Laura Cox, QC, and I hope that they will do so.

I also understand that the Clerk of the House has this morning provided the right hon. Lady with a note on the standard terms of compromise agreements, now called settlement agreements, between the House and staff who leave under individual arrangements—matters in which, I should emphasise, I am not myself involved and never have been. He, that is to say the Clerk of the House, has explained that these are not non-disclosure agreements, in the sense generally used, and do not in any way seek to prevent disclosure of wrongdoing on public interest grounds—i.e. whistleblowing. I am asking the Clerk to make this note more widely available.

As for myself, I say to the right hon. Lady and to the House that I have made a public statement, to which I have nothing to add.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At the risk of pushing my luck, are you prepared, at least in the context of the personal statement you have already made, to confirm that the great majority of members of staff in your office have served you for a substantial period of years and that the great majority of those who have left your service during your speakership have left on perfectly amicable terms?

Mr Speaker: I am very happy to confirm both. I have a superb team of dedicated, effective and long-serving staff, five of whom have served me for a collective total of over 40 years. I am also happy to confirm that the great majority of people who have left my service have done so on perfectly amicable terms.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a strange point of order. Can you confirm that, unless a complaint has actually been made and a process has actually begun, it would be quite invidious for you to have to comment on matters or allegations that are reported in the press and elsewhere? It would not be fair on the person being alleged against, and it certainly would not be fair to any complainants, which is why I think it is right that we are talking about future processes. Until such complaints come forward, it is very difficult for all of us as hon. Members, and especially for you, to engage with this, beyond the limited statement you have already made.

Mr Speaker: In the two cases to which public reference has been made, there has been none such. It is absolutely right, of course, that work should be taken forward under the auspices of the Leader of the House with a view to presenting policies for the approval of the House, including, very importantly, an independent grievance procedure. I am on record on that matter on a number of occasions, and I gave evidence to the cross-party inquiry. My support for thoroughgoing change is very well known and has been oft-repeated. I am happy to take the opportunity to repeat that support today.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance on how to secure the correction of a statement made by the Government. In September 2017, the Cabinet Office wrote that

“alleged electoral fraud through voter impersonation more than doubled between 2014 and 2016”.

That statement was later used to justify the Government's voter identity trials, which are taking place at the local elections in some parts of the country tomorrow.

The UK Statistics Authority stated yesterday that the Government have misled the public to believe that voter fraud by impersonation has risen. Although the number of alleged cases of impersonation rose from 21 to 44 between 2014 and 2016, the total number of votes cast in those years rose from 29 million to 64 million, and the number of cases subsequently dropped off to 27 in 2017.

Mr Speaker, can you advise me on what I can do to ensure the Government correct their misleading statement?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, whom I thank for giving me notice that she wished to raise the matter. She has raised it, and she has put her concern very forcefully on the record. That concern will have been heard on the Treasury Bench, and a Minister is welcome to respond if they wish to do so.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I will be brief. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) for her courtesy in also letting me know of her letter in advance of this point of order. I am also grateful for the letter itself, which highlights the importance of the pilots that are taking place tomorrow to safeguard the security of our electoral system. I am happy to commit to answering her letter in due course.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the Minister for that clear reply. It is, of course, the case that what Members say in this place—this applies equally to Ministers and to non-Ministers—is a matter of their individual

responsibility, rather than something upon which I can adjudicate. If there is error, it is the responsibility of the Member to correct the record. I am extremely grateful to the Minister for her courtesy and speed in coming to the Dispatch Box.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I submitted three named day questions on 18 April for answer on 24 April, some of which covered the Opposition day motion that is to follow, including asking when Ministers were involved in the destruction of Windrush landing cards. What is your view and expectation, and this House's view and expectation, of Ministers meeting the timetable for named day questions, given that I have not yet received an answer? When can I expect any Home Secretary to come forward with an answer to those written questions?

Mr Speaker: I am not psychic, but my response to the hon. Gentleman is to say that, under successive recent Governments, a greater premium has started to be placed upon the timeliness and substantive content of answers to colleagues' parliamentary questions. Ordinarily, the Leader of the House would tend to see it as part of his or her responsibility—currently her responsibility—to chase errant Ministers who fail timeously to reply to questions, and there is, at best, a healthy competition between Government Departments as to which can do so to maximum satisfaction.

Certainly if there is a named day question, that question should be answered on time. I am frankly disappointed if the hon. Gentleman has not had that service. What I would say to him is, first, it is quite possible—I think he knows this—that, as a result of

airing the matter in the Chamber today, a reply might be more speedily forthcoming than would otherwise have been the case.

Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman wished to follow the practice of the late Sir Gerald Kaufman, he might be minded to table a written question asking a Minister when they intended to reply to his earlier named day question. In Sir Gerald's experience, publicly reminding a Minister that an answer had not been received tended to elicit the said answer.

I hope that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, more widely to colleagues, perhaps particularly to new Members across the House.

BILL PRESENTED

TENANT FEES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary James Brokenshire, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr David Lidington, Secretary Sajid Javid, Secretary David Gauke, Secretary Greg Clark and Mrs Heather Wheeler, presented a Bill to make provision prohibiting landlords and letting agents from requiring certain payments to be made or certain other steps to be taken; to make provision about the payment of holding deposits; to make provision about enforcement and about the lead enforcement authority; to amend the provisions of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 about information to be provided by letting agents and the provisions of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 about client money protection schemes; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 203) with explanatory notes (Bill 203-EN).

Victims of Terrorism (Pensions and Other Support)

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

2 pm

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about support for victims who have been severely injured or bereaved as a result of acts of terrorism by an unconnected person or organisation in the United Kingdom; to establish a review of pension support for such victims; to require that review to make proposals for additional support taking account of the effects on occupational pension provision for such victims; and for connected purposes.

It is an absolute privilege to present this ten-minute rule Bill on an issue that I, and my colleagues, care very deeply about and that I have been involved with for many years. It is particularly poignant that this month marks the first anniversary of the Manchester Arena bombing, an appalling act of terrorism that has touched, and continues to touch, so many hundreds of people in its brutal impact.

When a terrorist attack happens, it rightly unites our nation in shared revulsion and condemnation. The headlines show the appalling and shocking events. The voices of those hurt, the pictures of chaos and distress from the scene, and the stories of those lost are rightly given prominence across our media platforms. We stand united in grief, as the images of horror and destruction are shown on television screens, computers and newspapers. Thoughts, prayers and best wishes are sent. People post and change their social media profiles to images of solidarity. Yet how quickly after the headlines have faded the acuteness of the shock and horror dissipates for many; the rest of the world, it seems, moves on. But for those most deeply impacted, it is often the end of their world as they knew it. Their lives have been shattered. They continue to suffer the loss of a loved one, with a huge human-shaped gap in their lives: a loving child, spouse, sister or brother, mother or father, friend, gone in the most brutal of ways. Tears continue to fall long after the media frenzy has passed.

There are those whose journey begins only once the headlines change and the profile pictures revert—that long painful process of recovery from severe physical injuries. For others, the mental health pressures of the trauma they experienced or witnessed may take many years to manifest, blighting lives, relationships and hope. In Northern Ireland, we have been disproportionately impacted by terrorism. Those violent attacks and atrocities made victims from all religions, races, faiths and creeds. Compassion for their needs should be something that unites us all, regardless of political opinion and view, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with my colleagues in Northern Ireland, including the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), and with colleagues from across this House.

We have seen at first hand in Northern Ireland that the needs of victims often last a lifetime. I believe the United Kingdom should aspire to be the global leader in how we treat our victims of terrorism, which is why, in this Bill, I am calling for a comprehensive review of the support we give to all our victims of terrorism across the UK. The terrorism that impacted so significantly

in Northern Ireland also destroyed lives across the United Kingdom, from London to Warrington, Birmingham and beyond. Nor is the issue of the victims of terrorism simply one of legacy; sadly, this is a continuing threat and reality. How we remember the wrongs of the past and support those who were hurt the most should be the very hallmark of what we are as a society. This is about compassion. Victims must not be forgotten. It is right and proper that their needs are addressed, and this work should be led from the very top, from our Government. A comprehensive review leading to enhanced support and clear actions can make us a world leader in the care and support that we give.

There are a number of distinct issues that I want to touch on briefly, many of which are based on our experience in Northern Ireland, the first of which is the needs of the bereaved. In any atrocity, the families and loved ones should be treated with compassion and care. Timely information and support services should be provided as quickly as possible. The trauma and distress of losing a loved one in such a sudden and violent way brings about particular challenges. Counselling and bereavement services must be available where and when they are needed. Such a loss can also create a sudden change of family circumstances and financial hardship.

I have also had the opportunity to speak to those victims bereaved and injured as a result of Libyan-supplied Semtex. Much work has been done to try to secure support and compensation for victims. I strongly urge the Government to look afresh and urgently at the proposals seeking to support victims in need. I welcome the engagements so far, but now is the time for action. A review should look into not only the options of how to secure moneys from the Libyan Government, but how support can happen now, while those negotiations are ongoing.

Secondly, a review must examine the mental health legacy of terrorism and violent trauma. Over recent years, a number of key studies, particularly in Northern Ireland, have examined the profound impact of terrorism and violent trauma on mental health, which often does not manifest itself until many, many years later. Rates of self-harm, suicidal ideation, rates of suicide, substance abuse and family break-up are all considerably higher among those who suffered the trauma of terrorism. The review must look at how mental health supports can be put in place, both at community and NHS level, to identify and address trauma in victims, and build on the incredible work that organisations already do across the UK in this field.

Thirdly, the review should examine the impact of dealing with a terrorist attack—usually its aftermath—on our emergency services and first responders to the scene. Over recent decades, we have all become much more aware of the impacts of trauma on mental health. In Northern Ireland, during the worst of the terrorist campaign, there was limited support and help for the police officers, Army personnel, ambulance staff, firemen, nurses and doctors—those who are on the frontline in dealing with horrific injuries and multiple casualties. Many were left deeply traumatised, and for many post-traumatic stress disorder was not identified or did not manifest itself until many years later. I know that across this House we would all want to pay tribute to those brave men and women who work so valiantly, in incredibly difficult circumstances, to help and support the dying

and injured. A review should examine how we can have a comprehensive and timely support service for our emergency services.

Lastly, I want to speak briefly about the particular needs of the physically disabled. In the Manchester Arena attack, more than 100 people were injured, some of those very severely. The headline figures are often about those who tragically lose their lives, but I believe we all underestimate the gravity of the injuries caused by these types of attacks. Over the years, tens of thousands of people across the United Kingdom have been left with serious traumatic injuries as a result of terrorism, and these victims are living with those injuries every day. The availability of severe pain management, rehabilitation support, prosthetics and other aids is critical throughout the decades that they have to live with the injuries. The review must also examine the proposal for the introduction of a special pension for the severely disabled across the United Kingdom.

Many victims of terrorism suffered traumatic injury to limbs, particularly lower limbs. Although I welcome the fact that workplaces have increasingly become more accessible for those with mobility challenges, particularly wheelchair users, we should also recognise that that was not always the case. Many victims sustained these horrific lower-limb and other injuries relatively early in their working life. Most workplaces were not suitable for wheelchair access during those decades, and many had to leave work. That has created a very particular wrong, as those victims, who continue to suffer these terrible severe injuries, are dealing with the impact of ageing on those injuries, and they face older age without any occupational or work-related pension.

I pay tribute to the many victims who have worked so hard on this issue, raising its profile and meeting politicians across the various political parties to raise awareness about it.

I do not wish to dwell for long on the definition of a victim, save to say that to me this is very straightforward. The terrorist who drives a van into crowds of people, who wields the knife, who shoots to kill or who plants the bomb is not a victim, even if he is killed in doing so. To me, that is absolutely clear and right. That is why I have clearly referenced in the long title of this Bill, “acts of terrorism by an unconnected person or organisation”.

In conclusion, I hope that the Government will listen and respond to the calls for a comprehensive review of support for victims of terrorism across the United Kingdom, and that there is continued wide support for my call for compassion and action to support all those brave victims from across this country, and for them to get the help they need and deserve.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Emma Little Pengelly, Kate Hoey, Andrew Bowie, Andrew Bridgen, Colin Clark, Faisal Rashid, Andrew Rosindell, Mr Laurence Robertson, Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Nigel Dodds, Ian Paisley and Gavin Robinson present the Bill.

Emma Little Pengelly accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October, and to be printed (Bill 204).

Opposition Day

[10TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Windrush

2.12 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, that she will be graciously pleased to give directions that the following papers be provided to the Home Affairs Committee: all papers, correspondence and advice including emails and text messages, from 11 May 2010 up to and including 1 May 2018, to and between Ministers, senior officials and Special Advisers relating to policy decisions including on the Immigration Acts 2014 and 2016 with regard the Windrush generation cases, including deportations, detentions and refusal of re-entry, the setting of deportation and removal targets and their effect on the Windrush generation, and action taken within Government following the concerns raised by Caribbean Governments with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office including the original decision by the Prime Minister not to meet Caribbean Heads of Government and officials, and all copies of minutes and papers relating to the Cabinet's Immigration Implementation Taskforce.

First, I congratulate the Home Secretary on his appointment and welcome him to his first full-scale parliamentary debate as Home Secretary.

On 22 June 1948 the Empire Windrush sailed into history, arriving at Tilbury docks, bringing workers from the Caribbean to respond to post-war labour shortages. There were 492 passengers in all, many of them children. Some of the men had served as soldiers in the British Army during the war, but many of the passengers had never travelled before, and many others were from deep rural Jamaica and had never been to a city approaching the size of London.

That ship gave its name to a whole generation, who came to this country from 1948 to 1973, and this debate is about them—patriotic, courageous men and women who helped to rebuild this country after the war.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): The history that my right hon. Friend tells is one that we should, of course, all be proud of. I was wondering whether she knew why Brixton and the area that I and the other hon. Members here represent became a hub for so many in the black community. First, we had deep bomb shelters, which were provided as the temporary accommodation for those who first arrived on Windrush, and, secondly, they settled in Brixton to be near the job centre because they wanted to work.

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding us of why Brixton was a focus for the Windrush generation. West London—Paddington, Notting Hill—was also a focus, largely because people got off at Paddington and looked for somewhere to live.

The Home Secretary has said that he “will do what it takes” to sort out the Windrush scandal, and I hope this afternoon's debate will help him to understand the entirety of what it will take to revolve the scandal. This is not an issue that will go away.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I commend my right hon. Friend for the work that she has done on this issue for many, many years. This of course goes well beyond the Windrush generation,

[Stephen Doughty]

extending to many people from across the Commonwealth and former empire. The history of the Cardiff docks communities is very much one of strong Caribbean, African, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and Yemeni communities, all of whom paid a huge contribution over hundreds of years. Does she agree that this goes much wider than Windrush?

Ms Abbott: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. I was going to make that point in the course of my remarks.

The Windrush generation were the first cohort to come here, but then there was south Asia, Sri Lanka—there is a whole series of Commonwealth migrants who, unless the Home Secretary does what it takes, will suffer the same humiliation as the Windrush generation.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): At the moment the right hon. Lady has not said a word that I have disagreed with, and I thank her for how she has said it. She referred to an issue that will not go away. Another issue that will not go away is, of course, the issue of illegal immigration, which is absolutely embedded within this whole debate. Can or will the right hon. Lady be—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. [Interruption.] Order!

Simon Hoare: I am sorry; I did not hear you.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I am sorry; I normally am heard, but I have a very quiet voice, as you well know. Lots of people here have a very keen interest in this debate, and I want to make sure that everybody who has put their name in does speak. If we are going to have interventions, will those who are hoping to speak please try not to intervene? You will end up moving yourself down the list—and please, interventions must be short.

Ms Abbott: I listened with interest to what the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) said, but he will understand that this debate is being watched all over the Commonwealth, and by the Windrush generation people themselves, and it is important that we all show a genuine concern, because they are the focus of the debate.

The Windrush scandal raises a number of issues of paramount importance. The first duty of the state is to defend the safety and security of its citizens, but under this Government's policies we have a situation where citizens of this country are being denied their liberty through immigration detention, are being refused re-entry to this, their own country, have been made homeless or jobless, have been denied NHS treatment and have been left destitute. They have been, and continue to be, threatened with deportation. We have a situation where some citizens of this country do not have their security and safety defended. In fact, the agency undermining their safety and security is this Government and their policies.

Let me turn to the role of the Prime Minister, both currently and in her previous position as Home Secretary.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): Does the right hon. Lady believe that we should reduce illegal immigration?

Ms Abbott: Nobody on the Opposition side of the House supports illegal immigration, but the hon. Gentleman must appreciate how distressing it is for the Windrush generation to see the way that Members on the Government side of the House turn to illegal immigration whenever the subject of the Windrush generation is raised. They were not illegal. It is interesting how forenamed Members want to pivot and to talk about illegal immigration.

I want to talk about the role of the Prime Minister. Many people feel that, with the Windrush scandal, all roads lead back to her. It was the Prime Minister who was responsible for some of the worst aspects of the hostile environment. It was the Prime Minister who initiated the notorious go-home immigration vans. It was the Prime Minister who introduced the “deport first, appeal later” regime, and we know from documents in the public domain that it was the Prime Minister who set deportation targets.

It has been revealed that the right hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), the former Home Secretary, wrote a four-page memo to the Prime Minister on 30 January. In it, the right hon. Lady set out what she described as an “ambitious” plan “ruthlessly” focusing Home Office priorities and stated:

“I will be refocusing IE's work to concentrate on enforced removals. In particular I will be reallocating £10m (including from low-level crime and intelligence) with the aim of increasing...enforced removals by...10%...over the next few years”.

Ministers can try to dance on the head of a pin, but 10% is a target on any reasonable understanding of the term.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I feel I have to make some progress.

There is no question but that the existence of these targets put pressure on officials to hit those targets and contributed to the way the Windrush generation was treated. So the question is posed—

Mrs Main: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Several times, the right hon. Lady has graciously given way or has indicated that she is about to give way, but now it seems that she has received instructions from behind her.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Let me reassure the House: it is up to the Member who is speaking whether they— [Interruption.] Order. Thank you for the advice, but I am quite capable of speaking for myself. What I would say is that it is up to the Member who is speaking whether they give way or not. I want to make sure that everybody gets in. Quite rightly, if the shadow Home Secretary does not want to give way, she does not need to.

Ms Abbott: I am conscious that a number of hon. Members want to contribute to the debate, and therefore I am anxious to make progress.

So given that the Prime Minister knew so much about the target regime, we have to wonder, when she heard the various denials from the former Home Secretary, why did she not think to correct the record, or at least advise the then Home Secretary accurately to correct the record. Why did she not do that?

The Prime Minister's record and her responsibility are clear. We have had go-home vans; the "deport first, appeal later" policy; targets for removals and for unsuccessful immigration appeals; protections against—

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: A number of hon. Members want to contribute to this important debate, and I am anxious to make progress.

Ministers now express their concern about the Windrush generation, saying that they came here, were invited and have contributed to this country's prosperity. I might add that the Windrush generation enriched us in many other ways too, socially and culturally. That is what migrants do. Overwhelmingly, they come to build a better life for themselves and their family—wherever they are from, wherever they are going—and in building a better life for themselves and their family, they contribute to the prosperity of all. That is why it is time that we had a more positive narrative on migration.

As we heard earlier, Government Members and Ministers would far prefer to talk about illegal immigration than the plight of the Windrush generation. As I said earlier, no one on the Opposition Benches supports illegal migration. We are all in favour of the removal of people who are here illegally. We could start with the number of prisoners who judges have directed should be removed at end of sentence, but many are not removed because of an organisational failure by the Home Office in getting the paperwork correct.

For our part, the Labour party has pledged to recruit 500 extra border guards to deal with illegal immigration, people and drug trafficking, and smuggling. We do not want to support illegal immigrants; we want to prevent people who do not have the right to be here from entering the country. This Government and their immediate predecessors cut the border guards, so it is distressing to hear them talk about illegal immigration, rather than focusing on what is happening to the Windrush generation.

The Windrush generation are here legally, yet they continue to be talked about by some Government Members as if they were here illegally. The Government were warned that negative outcomes for Commonwealth citizens who had been here for decades would be a consequence of their hostile environment policy. Many people in the House warned them, including myself, as well as many others outside the House.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I am afraid not. I am trying to make progress.

The warnings from the Opposition and individuals such as myself, and from all sorts of stakeholders, were ignored. The Government ploughed ahead regardless, with the consequences that we all see.

I also want to point out to the House that the Windrush generation includes people who came here as children before 1973. They have to be considered. In some cases, a lack of the documentation that the Home Office has only recently begun to insist on under this Government means that grandchildren may be caught up as well. All of this must end.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Is she as surprised as I am that, despite the national debate over the last two weeks, when my office called the Home Office MP helpline yesterday to support a Windrush-affected constituent and inquire about the process, we were told that the helpline staff had been given no guidance on citizenship applications? My constituent, who has to prove that he has been here since 1965 with two forms of ID for every year, is in despair.

Ms Abbott: It does not seem that we have moved away from the Windrush situation altogether if somebody is being asked for two pieces of documentation for every year they have been here, as that was the problem for the Windrush generation—excessively rigid demands for documentation and no proper guidance.

Dr Murrison: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: No.

So the children of people who came here before 1973 have to be considered, and as my hon. Friends have said, the scandal also includes those who came from many other Commonwealth countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and countries in west Africa. It is not just about the Caribbean; these cases arise now only because many of those people came here—were invited here—earlier than the others.

In speaking about the Commonwealth, I made this point in my urgent question earlier in the week: this is an issue that has resonated around the Commonwealth—it is front-page news not just in the Caribbean, but in a range of Commonwealth countries. The point I was trying to put over to the Home Secretary is that, when we are trying to build our relationships with the Commonwealth for trade and other reasons—post-Brexit certainly, but I would support it in any event—what has been revealed about the way Commonwealth citizens have been treated is extremely damaging. That is not the most important reason to clear up this mess, but it is a reason to clear it up. I hope that the Home Secretary understands that.

Dr Murrison: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I am afraid that I need to make progress.

I know that the Home Secretary is going to speak about his proposals for a package of measures to increase transparency.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way on the issue of transparency?

Ms Abbott: I give way to my hon. Friend. *[Laughter.]*

Clive Efford: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for winding up Government Members even further by giving way to me. If passed, this Humble Address is binding on the Government to publish all the documents relating to this matter and to provide those documents to the Select Committee on Home Affairs. I understand that the Government have issued a three-line Whip to vote against the motion. Can she explain what possible reason they might have for doing so?

Ms Abbott: I can only speculate about why the Government would vote against this motion.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Would the right hon. Lady like to find out? Will she give way?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Can we please have a little less noise from the Back Benches? The right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) will be called to speak early in the debate and we want to hear her contribution, so I do not want her to waste her voice by shouting too much.

Ms Abbott: Do Government Members understand how voting against this motion will look to the Commonwealth and the Windrush generation here? Do Government Members understand how the laughter that we heard a few minutes ago will be seen by the Windrush generation? It is as if they do not take this issue seriously.

Anna Soubry: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Could the record show that there was no laughter on these Benches, as has just been alleged?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is certainly not a point of order, but I can assure hon. Members that there was laughter from both sides of the House.

Ms Abbott: As I was saying, Members of the Windrush generation and people who live in Commonwealth countries will be watching this debate, and they will have heard Government Members laugh. They will get the sense that Government Members are not taking this matter entirely seriously.

Dr Morrison: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Lady just referred to this as a debate. I seek your guidance on whether this can legitimately be described as a debate given that the right hon. Lady consistently refuses to take interventions from Conservative Members.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Dr Morrison, you and I both know that that is definitely not a point of order. I will repeat what I said at the beginning, which is that it is up to each individual whether they wish to give way. That is how the House works and it is how the House will continue.

Ms Abbott: I remind the Home Secretary of the information that many of us campaigning on the issue want. We want to have the figures for deportations. Ministers are currently saying that there have been no deportations.

James Cartlidge: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to table a motion that calls on the sovereign potentially to breach the Data Protection Act 1998 and, in particular, the general data protection regulation rules that will be coming into force in two weeks' time in relation to text messages?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am getting very worried that somebody just might make a point of order, but that is definitely not one.

Ms Abbott: I said at the beginning of my speech that we should focus on the Windrush generation. It will not look well to them or any of our constituents if Government Members seek to go off on some kind of tangent.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I really have to continue.

We need to know the number of deportations and removals. We also need information about Windrush generation persons who are in immigration detention. The Government must know the number of people who are held in detention and why they are there. I have met Windrush generation persons in Yarl's Wood detention centre, so I will continue to press the Government to provide that information. We also want information on the number of people who have been refused re-entry—people who perhaps went back to their country for a funeral or some such event, but were refused re-entry at the airport. These people have to face humiliation and separation from their family. We need to know the number of people in that situation. We cannot just brush it aside. Imagine what it is like for an elderly woman who has been home for a funeral to be stopped at the airport on her return and told that she cannot come home. We want to know the number of British people who have been refused re-entry.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I have to make progress.

I had a meeting about Windrush in the House of Commons about two weeks ago. Some 500 people attended and there were 200 people on the waiting list, and these people were extremely anxious. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) had a meeting yesterday that the Immigration Minister attended, and the people there were also concerned and anxious.

At yesterday's meeting I was pleased to meet Amelia Gentleman for the first time, and I want to take this opportunity to praise her for her work, because she came back to this story week after week. Her newspaper put it on the front page. She showed a commitment to this story that some journalists might not have; they might have walked away or moved on. Many members of the Windrush generation really appreciate her campaigning and journalism, and I am glad to pay tribute to that this afternoon.

A number of issues were raised at yesterday's meeting, which was organised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham. These issues have also been raised with me. A number of people found themselves literally destitute because of the way in which this policy worked. What type of policy making results in British people being put on the street because of this so-called bearing down on illegal immigrants? These people, who the Government put on the street, were British. People have also been given biometric identity cards, but they want to know why they cannot have passports like anyone else. I presume that the Home Secretary will be able to tell me.

It was clear from the meeting yesterday that many people are still frightened to come forward. We welcome any clarity from the Home Secretary because until people do not think that they will be picked up and detained if they approach officials, people who have been harmed will not come forward. This is very important. No one wants British citizens to be afraid to approach the authorities.

People at the meeting were concerned about compensation. As soon as we can have more details on compensation, they will be welcomed. Windrush

compensation could cover pain, suffering and loss of amenity. It could also cover damages arising from: loss of liberty; impact on private and family life; unlawful detention; loss of employment; past loss of earnings; travel expenses; moving costs; legal fees; healthcare costs; loss of state benefits; past loss of pension; care and assistance; future loss of earnings; and loss of pensions. That is to name but a few. People are anxious that the Government's promises of compensation will be meaningful and will cover the issues that I have touched on. If I could say just one thing in this debate, it would be that it is really important that we get the process for compensation right. Only then will the Windrush generation feel that they have been treated fairly.

There are other substantive questions for the Home Secretary. He must surely understand by now how serious this issue is and how far-reaching are the consequences of his Government's policies—policies that he has supported throughout. Has his Department been in contact with British embassies and high commissions in Commonwealth countries so that they can use their best endeavours to establish where people have been wrongly deported? I referred to detention and to people refused re-entry. Similarly, how many people “voluntarily” left under threat of deportation? What information has the Home Secretary's Department requested and received from Heads of Government of Caribbean nations and others regarding people who have been deported or otherwise prevented from returning to the UK?

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Jeremy Quin *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I think the right hon. Lady has given notice that she will not be giving way.

Ms Abbott: We need to know more about the process—

Justine Greening: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: There are 45 people who want to speak in this debate, so—

Anna Soubry: Shocking!

Ms Abbott: What is shocking is the way that the Windrush generation have been treated.

We want information as soon as possible about the independent means of establishing fair compensation. Has the Home Office issued written instructions to the call handlers of the helpline that they should not report cases for deportation enforcement where they believe that people are here legally? Did the Home Secretary's Department issue advice to the immigration tribunals and judges on the changes in the Immigration Act 2014?

The new Home Secretary demurs from the term “hostile environment”. We appreciate that, but of course he was not the architect of this policy: it was the Prime Minister, and she has not resiled from that policy. In May 2012, she told readers of *The Daily Telegraph*—

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I have to make progress.

In May 2012, the Prime Minister told readers of *The Daily Telegraph*:

“The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration.”

As I have said, no Opposition Member supports illegal migration, but the problem with the hostile environment that the Government set up was that it swept perfectly legally British citizens up with it. So the Home Secretary will forgive me if I wonder about his claiming now to be abandoning the “hostile environment” title. I say this with all due respect, but his predecessor never seemed to be in command of policy on this matter. She was used as a human shield by the Prime Minister. I would hate to think that he will find that he is not in charge of policy on this matter either, but the Prime Minister is. In any event, unless and until the Prime Minister announces the abandonment of the form of hostile environment policy that she instituted and demonstrates that that is the case, we should all understand that the policy remains in place: the labelling and the spin do not matter. Unless the Government formally change their policies, Opposition Members will be clear, and this country will know, that their treatment of the Windrush generation was not an aberration and not a hiccup—it was the predicted consequence of a policy that they intend to continue with.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I am coming to an end now.

One of the important things about the Windrush scandal is that it is an opportunity to review immigration policy and the administration of immigration policy. We now have a situation where, because of the way that immigration is currently administered, this Government are preventing doctors from coming to take up jobs that they have been offered by the NHS. The NHS is in crisis. There is a shortage of 10,000 doctors, and the total number of NHS vacancies is in the tens of thousands. We therefore need to review immigration policy so that it is not only more humane but actually works in the interests of this country. We have seen a similar grotesque policy of wrongly removing overseas students from courses they have paid for, as this morning's *Financial Times* reports. The NHS is suffering, our education system is suffering, and many others sectors are suffering: all because of a narrative on immigration that deems immigration to be toxic.

Finally, let me say this. The Windrush generation played an important role after the war. The Windrush generation are very meaningful to many of us who were brought up by that generation. They did not deserve to be treated in the way that they were. Ministers say they did not know, but there was a pattern in what was going on; they chose not know. As I said at the beginning, this issue is not going to go away. Opposition Members will not stop until we get not promises and not spin, but justice for the Windrush generation.

2.46 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Let me start by thanking the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington

[*Sajid Javid*]

(Ms Abbott) for what she said in her opening remarks in welcoming me to my new position. I appreciate her comments.

I know I am not alone when I say that there are men and women from the Windrush generation who have been seriously let down by the immigration system: men and women who have had their lives totally and utterly disrupted, and in many cases put on hold. As I made clear at this Dispatch Box on Monday, I will do whatever it takes to put this right. That means putting all our focus and our resources into dealing with this issue and helping those who have been affected by it.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): May I be one of the first to congratulate the Secretary of State and wish him all the best in his new role? Could he confirm whether staff are paid bonuses for the number of individuals they remove?

Sajid Javid: Bonuses are paid in some parts of the senior civil service. If they are, that is not a matter for Ministers. Ministers will not get involved. In the case of my Department, it would be the permanent secretary and other officials he would work with.

We want to make sure that we are putting all our resources into helping with the situation that has been created, doing everything we can. However, putting it right does not mean that we divert our time and effort into some massive, open-ended fishing expedition. The motion in the name of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and others is disproportionate and distracting. It would take help and capacity away from where it is needed by reassigning more than 100 officials, and that would of course create significant cost for taxpayers.

Stephen Doughty: With regard to officials, the Home Secretary did not, with the greatest respect, give an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on the issue of bonuses. Have senior officials, including Hugh Ind, Mandie Campbell—a former member of staff—Glynn Williams or Philip Rutnam, received bonuses related in any way to removals, deportation or detention targets: yes or no?

Sajid Javid: Like the hon. Gentleman, I am aware of some of the reports on that this morning. I have not personally had time to look into the particular issue of who may or may not have received bonuses. However, as I said, if there are senior civil servants who have received any bonuses, it is a matter for officials, not for Ministers.

Mrs Main: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. He is being very generous to the Opposition, when they were not to us. I notice the burdensome nature of what the motion requests. Why does he think the Opposition have picked documents from 2010 only and do not wish to look at 2009, when they were involved in some of the decisions?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend, as always, makes a very important point. A compliant environment has been put in place, and quite rightly; there should be a compliant

environment. That is something that all Governments have supported, including especially the previous Labour Government.

I referred earlier to the motion. This Government recognise the importance of transparency. Members of the Windrush generation and Members of the House need to have confidence that everything possible is being done. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced earlier a package of measures to bring greater transparency to Members of the House and to people in our community who have been affected. Let me set out those measures in a little bit more detail. First, I will be writing—

Clive Efford: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker—and this is a genuine point of order. The hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) just asked for the publication of documents that go back before 2010. If you were willing to accept a manuscript amendment to the motion, would the Government then support the motion?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not going to accept a manuscript amendment.

Mrs Main: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. To clarify, I did not ask if—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot hear what the point of order is. I cannot make a ruling on something I have not heard.

Mrs Main: There seems to be an allegation that I wish to see documents from 2009. I prefaced my remarks by mentioning the overly burdensome nature of what the motion requests and questioned why the Opposition were so selective, when some of this was on their watch.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is a point of correction.

Sajid Javid: I was just coming on to the greater transparency measures that I want to put in place. First, I will be writing each month to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) to give her and the House a report on progress. Secondly, I will also be writing to her each month on the latest position on detentions, removals and deportations. Thirdly, I will bring independent oversight and challenge to a lessons-learned review already under way in my Department. That review will seek to draw out how members of the Windrush generation came to be entangled in measures designed for illegal immigrants, why that was not spotted sooner and whether the right corrective measures are now in place. I have asked my permanent secretary to give the review the resources it needs and to aim to complete its work before the summer recess.

Simon Hoare: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Since his appointment on Monday, vile left-wing trolls have called him, among other things, a coconut and an Uncle Tom. Has that abuse motivated or depressed him in the challenge he faces?

Sajid Javid: I said earlier in the House that I am interested in a compliant, not a hostile environment. But, talking of a hostile environment, my hon. Friend reminds me of some of the hard left who have joined the Labour party ever since the right hon. Member

for Islington North became Leader of the Opposition and how their anti-Semitism has been tolerated—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot hear a word for the shouting. My problem is that if I cannot hear, I cannot make a judgment on what is being said. We have to keep in order. This is making life very difficult and does not do us any favours.

Sajid Javid: I was talking about members of the hard left who have created a hostile environment in their own party and people who welcomed my appointment by calling me a coconut and an Uncle Tom. If that is something the Leader of the Opposition thinks is wrong, why does he not get up at the Dispatch Box right now and denounce them? *[Interruption.]* I did not think he would want to say anything, and we know exactly what he thinks about a hostile environment in the Labour party against people's backgrounds. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. I want to hear this debate. We have constituents who want to hear this debate. This debate is very important to this country and the people of this country.

Ms Abbott: I simply want to respond to the Home Secretary by saying that I have been online condemning the racist abuse against him. I know what racist abuse is. Everyone in the Opposition, without exception, condemns the names that he has been called.

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for getting up at the Dispatch Box and making that absolutely clear. I thank her also for condemning the racism that I referred to. I know that she, like me, has suffered from racism. It is wrong when it happens to any person, whoever they are, and wherever they come from in our country. When it happens—particularly in political parties, including my own, where it has happened in the past—it is incumbent on all political leaders to stamp on it and to deal with it.

Justine Greening: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. Does he agree that this was a chance to have a debate about people, and instead the Opposition have chosen a motion that focuses on politicking and procedure? As someone who represents Windrush constituents, I very much welcome the steps he is taking to address the real concerns that those people are facing day to day.

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point. She says that this is about people, and that is exactly what I want to come on to in more detail.

It is important to note that my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), had already started important work to help the Windrush generation, and I would like to pay tribute to her efforts. These are people who are pillars of our society. They are people who are doctors, nurses, engineers and bus drivers—people just like my father, who came to this country inspired by hope and motivated by ambition. These individuals have made a huge contribution to making this country the great place it is to live.

That is why this Government have been taking action. As Members know, a dedicated taskforce has already been set up to provide the support these people deserve. Each person who is identified as potentially from the Windrush generation is called back by an experienced and sympathetic caseworker, who then helps them through the process. So far, there have been more than 7,000 calls, of which 3,000 have been identified as potential Windrush cases. That group is being invited to service centres around the country for appointments. Travel costs are also reimbursed. So far, more than 700 appointments have been scheduled and more than 100 people have had their cases processed and now have the documents they need. Those numbers are increasing by the day, and we will continue to schedule those appointments as a matter of urgency.

Chuka Umunna: I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. He is right about the contribution of the Windrush generation, but can he be absolutely clear that these are people who are here and always have been here lawfully? Will he also condemn the continual attempt, not just in the Chamber but in the country generally, to conflate legal immigration with illegal immigration? I am fed up, every time the Windrush generation are spoken about, of continually hearing, “Well, what about illegal immigration?” We are talking about the Windrush generation.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct on both counts. My predecessor said it, I have said it and I am happy to say it again: the Windrush generation are here perfectly legally. There is nothing illegal whatsoever about it. Because the Immigration Act 1971 did not lead to documentation for those people, which has become familiar for many Members of the House, it is now right that we put that right and make it much easier to get them the documentation and formalise their status where that has not already been formalised. He is also right to point out the distinction between legal—the Windrush generation and many others—and illegal.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Sajid Javid: I will, one more time.

Mr Francois: I thank the Home Secretary for his generosity in giving way to Members on both sides of the House. The Windrush generation helped to rebuild this country after world war two, and we owe them a debt. Governments of all political colours make mistakes. It is clear that, despite the motion, some of this problem goes back beyond 2010, but we are where we are. Now that he has responsibility for this, can he confirm that he will strain every sinew to see that we do right by these people who did right by us?

Sajid Javid: I say to my right hon. Friend that I can confirm that, and I will do so. I will come on to cover in more detail the point he has made.

I want to address directly any concerns that people might still have about coming forward. As I told the House on Monday, any information provided to the taskforce will be used for no other immigration purpose than that of helping people to confirm their status. Any information provided will not be passed to immigration enforcement.

[Sajid Javid]

Let me remind the House of some of the other important changes this Government have introduced in the light of the Windrush situation. A Commonwealth citizen who settled in the UK before 1973 will now be entitled to apply for British citizenship—the legal status that they deserve—free of charge. We have made it clear that we will make the process they need to go through to get citizenship as simple as possible. While it is right that we are swiftly progressing urgent cases, all of this needs a proper legal underpinning, as hon. Members have suggested. That is why I will bring forward the necessary legislation to cover fee exemptions, fee reductions and changes to the citizenship process as soon as possible. I also recognise that, in some cases, people have suffered severe financial loss, and I want to put that right. That is why we are setting up a new compensation scheme. It will be overseen by an independent person, and we will consult on its scope, because it is important that we get the detail of this scheme right from the moment it begins.

It is essential in this debate that we do not lose sight of the distinction between legal and illegal migration. Successive Governments, including the previous Labour Government, have put in place what I would call a “compliant environment”—measures to tackle illegal migration—and this is a perfectly sensible approach to take. I will give some examples. The first NHS treatment charges for overseas visitors and illegal migrants were introduced in 1982, as were checks by employers on someone’s right to work in 1997, measures on access to benefits in 1999 and civil penalties for employing illegal migrants in 2008. More recent measures in the Immigration Acts 2014 and 2016, which were debated in this House at length, introduced checks by landlords before property is rented out and checks by banks on account holders.

As I made clear in this House on my first day in this role and as I have just said, I do not believe that the term “hostile environment” is in tune with our values as a country. This is about having a compliant environment. Measures over many years to tackle illegal immigration are of course a good thing, and we stand by those measures. They are designed to ensure that work, benefits and services in the UK go only to those who have the right to access them, and that is what the public rightly expect the Government to do. We are protecting our public services, and taking action against rogue employers, landlords and organised crime groups who exploit vulnerable migrants and damage our communities. We carefully balance the need to tackle illegal immigration with the need to protect those who are here lawfully from unintended consequences.

Mr Marcus Jones: My right hon. Friend is making a very good speech, and I am glad that he has very clearly set out how we are going to put right this wrong and support those in the Windrush generation who are clearly British citizens and are here legally. Does he not agree that we must be very careful about the language we use in the House, because some of the language I have heard used by Opposition Members today is scaremongering and will lead to people affected by this scandal not coming forward to get the support they need and deserve?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is incumbent on every Member of this House, if we are all to be united in helping the people who have been affected by this situation, to be careful about the language that they use.

Recent events have shown that the safeguards we already have in place need to go further, so that is exactly what we are doing. For example, we have already put in place additional support for employers and landlords to safeguard members of the Windrush generation seeking jobs or rented accommodation. Updated guidance on gov.uk encourages employers and landlords to get in touch with the Home Office checking service if any Commonwealth citizen does not have the documents they need to demonstrate their status. The taskforce will contact the individual concerned to help them to prove their entitlement, and the employer or landlord will be issued with a positive notice.

My Department is working with other Departments and partner agencies from across the board to ensure that we have the relevant safeguards in place to prevent those from the Windrush generation from being denied the benefits and services to which they are perfectly entitled. Tomorrow, the Minister for Immigration will chair a cross-Government meeting to discuss this very matter with colleagues in more detail. We are also very conscious that ongoing immigration enforcement activity must not impact on people from the Windrush generation, and safeguards are being put in place to minimise such a risk.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary has announced the additional safeguards he wants to put in place for the Windrush generation, but will he apply those safeguards more widely? In evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, we have heard that about 10% of the cases passed by the Home Office to banks are incorrect, and that the banks may therefore be taking action against people who are here legally because of errors by the Home Office. Will he put in place safeguards for everybody?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Lady makes a very important point, and I am looking precisely at that. She used the example of banks that may be acting inappropriately or in error, perhaps through no fault of their own. I will look at that very carefully, and I will get back to her, because this is a very important issue and she is absolutely right to raise it.

I must now conclude to leave other Members enough time to speak in this debate. I am clear that all the measures I have outlined today will make a real difference. I will continue to assess what further action needs to be taken, because I know that I am not alone in this House when I say that this situation has made me angry. I know that I am not alone when I say that it is unacceptable that there are those from the Windrush generation who feel hurt and betrayed by the country they call home. That is why the measures we are taking, and will continue to take, are so vital. We must make sure that those affected get the support and attention that they so rightly deserve, so that something like this can never happen again.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before we continue with the debate, I must announce the result of the deferred Division. In respect of the question relating to tribunals and inquiries, the Ayes were 315 and the Noes were 202, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]

Before I call the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) on behalf of the Scottish National party, let me say that it is obvious that a great many people wish to speak this afternoon and, although we have a lot of time, the time available is limited, so there will be an immediate time limit of six minutes on Back-Bench speeches. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why there is always an exclamation of amazement. I cannot be the only person who can do the arithmetic. The time limit does not of course apply to Joanna Cherry.

3.8 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Earlier this week, I welcomed the Home Secretary to his place and congratulated him on his appointment. I mentioned that it is a good thing he is the first BAME person to hold this great office of state, and I want to make it quite clear that the Scottish National party absolutely condemns any racist abuse he may have received from whatever quarter. As somebody who is on the receiving end of a daily diet of anti-Catholic and anti-gay abuse from the hard right in Scotland and across the UK, I know what it feels like to receive such abuse from whatever quarter, so he has my absolute support in resisting it. I thank the Home Secretary for his courtesy in explaining to me that he would not be able to stay for my speech because he has a very important Cabinet Committee meeting to attend. How much many of us would love to be a fly on the wall in that meeting.

The right hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), for whom I have a lot of respect, resigned as Secretary of State for the Home Department on account of having misled Parliament about her knowledge of the removal targets, but nobody has as yet been held to account for the policies that led to the imposition of those removal targets and caused the Windrush scandal.

Others who have Windrush constituents will speak eloquently today about the details of their position. I want to speak about the real, underlying reasons why this scandal has occurred and to say to the new Home Secretary, as represented here by his Immigration Minister, that he will be judged by this Parliament, and by the public watching outwith this Parliament, on the degree to which he has the gumption to address the underlying causes of the Windrush scandal rather than just fiddle around with the outcome.

What has happened to the Windrush generation is not an accident, it is not a mistake, it is not an aberration and it is not the work of over-zealous Home Office officials. It is, in fact, the direct result of the Prime Minister's imposition of a wholly unrealistic net migration target and of the contortions that have to be gone through to achieve that target, which, incidentally, has as yet not been achieved.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): There is another dimension to the hostile policy, which I have seen in fishing on the west coast. It is not directly

impacting on Windrush, but it is a similar aspect of the mentality at the Home Office. For eight years, we have been waiting to get non-European economic area labour in. Everybody wants the Home Office to give us a piece of paper that will keep the Home Office happy, but we just cannot get it. That is symptomatic of the Home Office that has led to Windrush.

Joanna Cherry: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. There are many people in the United Kingdom at the moment who make a great contribution to our society, but who are being made to feel very unwelcome at best and are being deported at worst, simply because they cannot evidence their right to be here.

These people have come to light as a result of another policy of the Prime Minister's—the hostile environment policy, which is a racist policy. I say that quite clearly: it is racist. When people of a certain ethnic background, or with a name that does not look British, apply for a tenancy or a job, that is when they come to light, and that is when suspicion falls upon them. It is absolutely disgraceful. That is why, at Prime Minister's questions this morning, despite the howls of derision from Conservative Members, I asked the Prime Minister to apologise for the policies that have caused this. I am still waiting for that apology, and I will be asking for it constantly. Policy has caused this problem, not mistakes—not mistakes by officials and not even mistakes by politicians. It is the direct imposition of policy that has caused this problem.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Does the hon. and learned Lady not agree that the Home Secretary must look at the issue of bonuses, because they create a culture? The buck stops at his door.

Joanna Cherry: It is absolutely astonishing that people should be given bonuses for the number of people they can boot out of the country. It is disgusting. What has the United Kingdom come to? I may be a Scottish nationalist, but I also consider myself British, and there are many aspects of the UK—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I am. Actually, I am half Irish as well—thank God, because I am getting an Irish passport. I am not one of those people who says the UK has never done anything good, but by God is this a smear on the UK's reputation across the world.

Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister would not even speak to the heads of delegations from the Commonwealth about this issue; she thought she could get it swept under the carpet. Then she thought she could use the right hon. Member for Hastings and Rye as her human shield. That did not work either. She thought she could come to the House this morning and get off the hook. Well, she is not off the hook. She needs to answer for the policies that have caused this problem.

We are hearing a lot today about how the Windrush generation will be sorted out. The previous Home Secretary gave us an undertaking that there would not be any more enforcement action against the Windrush generation. However, my question to the Home Secretary is this: if he cannot get the Windrush generation, which vulnerable group is he going to go after next to meet his targets?

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Has the hon. and learned Lady seen the *Financial Times* today? There is an article about the test of English for international

[Mike Gapes]

communication, which reveals that 35,000 people have had their status as students in this country revoked. In 20% of those cases, that was based on a system of voice recognition that has proved to be faulty. An estimated 7,000 Bangladeshi, Indian and other students, including my constituents, have been removed from this country, or are at the threat of removal at this moment, because of a policy introduced in 2014 by the then Home Secretary—now the Prime Minister.

Joanna Cherry: The hon. Gentleman is describing the results of this policy. The Government and the Home Office have to go after low-hanging fruit. They went after the Windrush generation, but they have been called out on that and they are embarrassed—hence all the shouting, the spurious points of order and the attempts to shut us up for calling them out.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. and learned Friend is making absolutely important points. This point about other vulnerable communities is hugely important, because more and more is coming to light. Does she agree that, in the light of the Windrush scandal, now is the opportunity for the UK Government to regularise the status of the Chagos islanders, who were forced off their land by the British state in the 1960s and 1970s? The second and third generations here are being denied British citizenship. This is an opportunity for the UK Government to put that injustice, along with so many others, right.

Joanna Cherry: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. As I said earlier this week, and as I will be repeating this afternoon, what we need now is a root and branch review of the Prime Minister's immigration policies, because they are not working—the Home Affairs Committee has heard evidence that they are not even working according to the Government's internal tenets.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The hon. and learned Lady is making a powerful case that the Prime Minister has many questions to answer. One of the key questions she needs to answer is: when was she told about the problems facing the Windrush generation? Was it when she was Home Secretary or Prime Minister? If it was when she was Home Secretary, she has many more questions to answer.

Joanna Cherry: The Prime Minister does have many questions to answer. My hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), as he said in a point of order, has laid down many written questions, which have yet to be answered. I suspect that the answers will be deeply embarrassing for the Government, and that is why those questions have not been answered.

I congratulate the official Opposition on having secured this debate on the Windrush scandal, but I make no apology for looking at the underlying reasons for it. I am afraid to say that they do not lie just with those on the Government Benches. There has been some unfortunate rhetoric from elements in the Labour party in the past. I realise that the Labour party is probably under new management now, and some of the new management had the gumption to vote with the SNP against the

2014 Immigration Bill. What I am trying to say is that a rather toxic rhetoric has grown up around immigration in both the Labour party and the Conservative party. It was, of course, Gordon Brown who famously spoke about British jobs for British workers, which the previous Home Secretary enthusiastically picked up on in a speech at the Tory party conference, promising tougher rules for foreign workers coming to Britain and taking our jobs. She suggested in an accompanying briefing that firms could be asked to publish lists of foreign workers. What kind of a union of nations are we becoming when it is seriously being contemplated that that sort of thing should happen?

Anna Soubry: The hon. and learned Lady is being very good in giving way. I agree with much of what she says, but she said that the Government “went after” the Windrush generation. The whole thing is a scandal, but would she agree that nobody has deliberately gone after the Windrush generation? She is right about a culture—I will dwell on that in my speech—but nobody has deliberately gone after the Windrush generation.

Joanna Cherry: I am sorry. Over recent months, I have found much about which the right hon. Lady and I can agree, but I cannot agree with her on that one. It was deliberate. There were targets; they were necessary to realise the Prime Minister's policies. Until Conservative Members wake up to that fact and accept it, nothing will change.

As I said, the SNP position is that there should be a root and branch review of immigration policy and of the 2014 and 2016 Acts, and that review should be based on evidence—not on ideology and not on the need to blame somebody else for our problems. I say that because I have noticed since I have been a Member of this House that there is a tendency on the Government Benches to blame difficulties with public services in England and difficulties with the infrastructure in England on immigrants. In actual fact, the reasons—

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

Joanna Cherry: No, I will not give way. I want to finish my point—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. and learned Lady will finish her point. She will be heard.

Joanna Cherry: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier today I was shouted down in this House and I have received an overwhelming number of messages from members of the public, and from some journalists, about how disgraceful that was. Many of them were not SNP supporters. I am very grateful to you for defending me.

My point is this: when somebody in England cannot find a home it is not because there are too many immigrants; it is because the Conservative party has not built any social housing. When somebody in England cannot get an NHS appointment or has to wait a ridiculously long time at accident and emergency, it is not the fault of immigrants; it is the fault of the Conservative party's austerity policies. My goodness,

earlier this week we heard that the Prime Minister would not even agree to pleas from her own Cabinet Ministers to let foreign doctors in to fill vacancies in the NHS. That is shocking.

Bim Afolami: The hon. and learned Lady said that there was a tendency by Conservative Members to blame the problems of the NHS or housing on immigrants. Will she please set out precisely to which speech of which person on this side of the House she is referring?

Joanna Cherry: That is a good try, but this is not something I thought up on the way into the Chamber. The toxic rhetoric around immigration in the United Kingdom is very well known. It is one of the reasons why there was a leave vote in 2016. Those on the Conservative Benches blamed immigrants rather than their austerity policies for the problems—[*Interruption.*]

I am calling for an evidence-based review of immigration policy. [*Interruption.*] I will very happily give evidence. [*Interruption.*] If I am allowed to speak, I will give Conservative Members some evidence. [*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. There is clearly disagreement about a particular point. That is why we have debates. The way in which we deal with disagreement is that one person puts their point of view and then a few minutes later someone else puts their point of view, but everybody must be heard and have their turn.

Joanna Cherry: I am very grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The evidence has been heard over a period of years by the Home Affairs Committee, the Exiting the European Union Committee, on which I sit, and the Scottish Affairs Committee. The weight of the evidence is that, in reality, immigrants are on average more likely to be in work, more likely to be better educated and more likely to be younger than the indigenous population. The overwhelming weight of the evidence heard by the Exiting the European Union Committee is that immigration is a net benefit to the United Kingdom. The director general of the CBI, no less—normally a great chum of those on the Conservative Benches—has called for an immigration policy that puts people first, not numbers. The CBI wants an evidence-based immigration policy, the Scottish Trades Union Council wants an evidence-based immigration policy and that is what the SNP wants.

In Scotland, historically our problem has been emigration—people leaving Scotland—rather than people coming into Scotland. By 2024—Madam Deputy Speaker, I guess we are both a part of the problem—the Scottish population is projected to grow by just 3.9%, as opposed to 7.5% in England. Some 90% of population growth in Scotland is projected to come from immigration. The time has come, in this review of immigration policy, to look seriously at the devolution of at least some powers over immigration to the Scottish Parliament, and to the English regions and Wales, to recognise the different requirements across the United Kingdom.

I know that these days we are, particularly those on the Conservative Benches, terribly inward-looking, but if we look outwards—

James Cartlidge: Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

Joanna Cherry: No, I will not give way. I am going to continue my point.

Canada, where its provinces have different immigration policies, is a shining example of what can be done in a federation. Conservative Members should leave England—if it will not turn them into a pumpkin—and go and have a wee look at what happens elsewhere in the world.

I am calling for the Home Secretary to do things differently from how they have been done before. He said that he does not want to use the phrase “hostile environment” any longer and I have heard people talking about a compliant environment. I would say to him that it is not the language that we need to change—although that would help—but the underlying policies. We need an immigration policy that works for the whole of the UK, taking into account national and regional differences. We need an immigration policy that works to the benefit of the economy and to the benefit of society.

We have heard a lot of Conservative Members challenge the Labour party, the SNP and other Opposition parties by saying, “What would you do about illegal immigration?” What I would say is that every country has to have a sensible system of immigration control, but it needs to operate in line with the law, it needs to be just and fair, it needs to be human rights compliant and it needs to take cognisance of the rule of law. We do not have a system like that in the UK at the moment.

Any Member who holds constituency surgeries can provide examples of constituents who have been treated unfairly by the Home Office. The auditor has pointed out that the Home Office makes an awful lot of mistakes: it is a very poor performing Government Department. We know that 50% of appeals are successful. We also know that, thanks to the Prime Minister, most people are bounced out of the country before they can actually make an appeal. To my mind, that is contrary to the rule of law.

The problem is that we have a system that has elided the difference between legal and illegal immigration. We have constituents who come to our surgeries whose husbands and wives are not able to remain in the United Kingdom. My constituency has a Kurdish community centre. I have numerous examples of members of the Kurdish nation—people who have stood by Britain, fought alongside the British Army, worked as interpreters and so on—who came here expecting to receive a welcome but have been treated as illegals. There is something wrong with our policy and I am not afraid to say that I think it is morally wrong.

United Kingdom immigration policy has gone off the tracks. We need to acknowledge our mistake and introduce an evidence-based ethical immigration policy. Conservative Members shout about evidence and examples. There is a huge weight of evidence that a devolved differential system of immigration could work across the United Kingdom. That evidence has been given to the Scottish Affairs Committee and, in very detailed submissions, by my colleagues in the Scottish Government to the Migration Advisory Committee.

Let us have the guts to admit that the Windrush scandal is not just a mistake or an aberration. It is the result of policies that are wrong. Let us change the names of those policies, let us change the policies and let us have an apology from the Prime Minister.

3.28 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): In line with your six-minute time limit, Madam Deputy Speaker, I promise to be brief, and I say somewhat gingerly that it is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry).

I begin by putting on record how proud I am, as the son of economic immigrants, to welcome to the post of Home Secretary my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), another son of economic immigrants. It is testament to the Conservative party, is it not, that only it would allow a Scots-Italian to be the Member of Parliament for South Leicestershire and a British Pakistani to become Home Secretary? This demonstrates clearly that the Conservative party believes only in meritocracy and nothing else in terms of how one should serve the public.

Like many others in the House, I welcome the change in tone and approach that my right hon. Friend has taken in his brief time as Home Secretary. Recent events demonstrate the need for a human face as to how our immigration system works, as well as the need for exercising greater judgment when and where it is justified, and I firmly believe that the Secretary of State fits that profile well. As such, I very much look forward to working closely with him on the Government side of the House.

As we are aware, the Windrush generation, like many of us, have built their lives here and had their families here, and most importantly, this is their country and home. To that end, I very much welcome the steps that the Government have taken on this matter, but as ever—as with most issues—there is of course more to be done. In accepting that the state has let these good people down, we have to ensure not only that we build through the first steps that my right hon. Friend outlined, but that we continue to build bridges and repair relationships for the Windrush generation.

I am pleased that the Home Secretary has recognised that when people have suffered loss, they will be appropriately compensated. As a former lawyer in the Treasury Solicitor's Department, I had the privilege of representing previous Home Secretaries, and I am all too aware of the litigious actions, some of which are entirely justified, that are brought against them in terms of unlawful detention and similar issues. I strongly encourage the Immigration Minister, who I am sure has already done so, to speak to colleagues in the Government Legal Department and ensure that the appropriate teams are in place to help those from the Windrush generation to obtain appropriate compensation, as outlined by the Home Secretary.

I especially welcome the setting up of a dedicated team to work with Government Departments, such as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions. I understand that this new team will include a dedicated point of contact and will aim to resolve most cases within two weeks. This is indeed welcome news. I am also pleased that the Home Office has recognised the circumstances in which some former Commonwealth citizens have been wrongly subjected to removal and detention. Of course that is entirely unacceptable, but I am satisfied by the Home Secretary's comments that departmental processes will be amended accordingly to ensure that this or similar situations never happen again.

I turn briefly to the situation of EU nationals, because it is important for the Home Office to recognise one administrative problem with processes that we would not want to develop. There is an oddity for children of EU nationals born in the United Kingdom between 2000 and 2006, in that they have to await their parents obtaining permanent residency in order to naturalise. I know that the Immigration Minister is looking carefully at the new settled status rules, but I ask her to look carefully at that issue to ensure that the Home Office adopts the right culture so that the documentation required for that category of EU nationals is appropriately obtained, with minimal delay and minimal inconvenience to them.

In closing, it is especially welcome to hear the Secretary of State's assurances that the Windrush generation affected, who have given so much to our country, will be able to acquire their deserved legal status at no cost in an efficient and quick manner. Similarly and equally importantly, I am pleased that the children of the Windrush generation, who in most cases are already British citizens, will also be able to naturalise at no further cost, further enshrining the rights of the Windrush generation for years to come.

3.34 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the speech by the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), who raised important, detailed and thoughtful points.

We have heard too many heartbreaking stories and about too many deep injustices—of people told they were not legal despite being British citizens, who have been made to feel unwelcome in their own country despite having worked here, lived here and loved here, very often for most of their lives and for longer than many of us in here have been alive; of people locked up wrongfully by the British state in their own country; and of people such as the pensioner I heard from who said his experience of simply trying to renew his passport had been so painful and brought back difficult memories of racism he had experienced as a child.

Many from the Windrush generation have told their own stories, and we should pay tribute to them for having the bravery to do so, even when, as some told me, they felt a sense of shame as a result. The Windrush families are not the ones who should feel shame. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) rightly said, this issue has brought a sense of national shame, and we must all now be determined to put it right. I welcome the new Home Secretary's promise "to do right" by the Windrush generation. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who has been passionately pursuing this cause, is right that the Government will be judged on their actions rather than their words. We will need to see the progress of the taskforce, which the Home Affairs Committee will monitor.

The motion refers to documents being sent to the Select Committee. As with similar motions that have referred documents to other Committees, we have not instigated this call; nor have we had the chance to discuss or take a view on the motion, and we would of course decide how to respond. The motion itself is obviously a matter for the House, but we will continue to pursue our own questions as well.

Jeremy Quin: The right hon. Lady served with distinction in former Administrations. Does she share my concern that this is a very wide-ranging motion? It lists papers provided to Ministers covering a huge area of policy. It appears to cover minutes of a Cabinet Sub-Committee and discussions about our relationships with other independent states. This very wide-ranging motion goes well beyond what its mover set out as information she required. What are the right hon. Lady's thoughts on that as a former Minister advised by civil servants?

Yvette Cooper: I am going to repeat what I said: our Select Committee has not had a chance to discuss this, but clearly we would be the recipients of the papers, if the motion were agreed to. It is for the House to debate the motion and for the Select Committee to decide how to respond, which we would do responsibly, as other Select Committees have done.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): The right hon. Lady and I both serve on the Home Affairs Committee. Does she share my concerns about the Labour motion? As Chair of the Committee, she has requested significant information on our behalf from the previous and current Home Secretaries, which will be forthcoming, so I wonder why Labour is asking for even more. Did the Labour Front-Bench team discuss with her what information she had requested on the Committee's behalf before tabling the motion?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman is right that we have requested a huge amount of information, and we will continue to do so, because we must continue our work on the Select Committee, which is separate from any decision the House makes. As he also makes clear, individual Committee members may take different views in this debate.

I want to pursue some important issues around the Windrush scandal. The Select Committee wants to know about the review the Home Secretary has announced. Who will it be done by? I would have concerns were it to be done by a Home Office official, given the concerns and questions raised by the targets and bonuses, which might have involved even the most senior of Home Office officials. We look forward to receiving more information on that, as well as on how the taskforce will respond, on the legal framework that will now cover the Windrush generation, on the compensation framework, and on other matters too.

I am concerned about our conflating the debate on the Windrush generation with the wider questions of illegal immigration. We all agree, I think, that the Windrush generation are here legally—they are British citizens. I also question the idea that the only problem is with a group of people who, because they did not get the right papers in 1973, have inadvertently ended up in the illegal immigration system, rather than the legal immigration system; there are, I believe, wider issues, based on evidence we have taken. The problem is that our immigration system does not have a good enough process for resolving who is here legally and who is here illegally. It is a system that makes too many mistakes, as has been highlighted in our Committee reports, in the inspectorate's reports, and in our recommendations. The problem is that when people do not fit into the boxes, the system does not help them. Too often, it spits them out. As we said in one of our recent reports,

"urgent action is needed to address errors in the enforcement process."

I hope that the Home Office will respond to our recommendations.

In cases in which appeals are still in place, half of them go against the Government because the Home Office has got it wrong, but in many cases there are no safeguards, independent checks or appeals. We heard last week that when people apply for "no time limit", as many of the Windrush families may have done, there is no way of appealing if the system gets things wrong, even if it is the Home Office that has screwed up or there has been some other error in the system.

We also know that there are problems with the burden of proof. A letter from a Home Office Minister explained that Mr Trevor Johnson's application had been turned down because

"He has...been unable to demonstrate that he has been continuously resident in the UK for the years 1989 to 1990, 1994 to 1995 and 1997 to 1998."

That means that he had provided proof of his residence for the remaining 45 years, but not for those three years. I could not give four pieces of proof of where I was in 1989 or 1994. I hope that the Home Secretary will now address that issue of the burden of proof.

The system is also terribly complicated, and no legal aid is available. It is impossible for those who struggle with literacy or mental health problems to navigate. It is also hugely expensive, and too often penalises people for simple mistakes. It was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* today that 600 highly skilled doctors, engineers and IT professionals who may have been here for many years are being denied leave to remain because of minor errors in their tax returns. I hope the Home Office will take that up, because it obviously extends beyond the Windrush generation.

There are also the questions about targets and the way in which they have operated. All Departments have targets, such as key performance indicators, but the problem in this instance is the absence of safeguards or independent checks to prevent the targets from distorting individual decisions. That is how injustices arise. Underlying all this has been the overall net migration target, which our Committee's report recommended should be replaced. It includes emigration as well as immigration, it includes people who are here legally as well as those who are here illegally, and it gives the Home Office as a whole an incentive to encourage people to leave whether they are here legally or not.

If something is to come out of this awful case, it must be this: we value and support the commitment of the Windrush generation, but we must also look much more widely throughout the immigration system at the things going wrong. An immigration system is crucial to any country's national identity. We believe that we are a fair country and a humane country, and we must ensure that those values are part of our immigration system.

3.43 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). I agreed with everything she said. I will not be voting for the motion, for what I suggest to the House is a very good reason: under the stewardship and chairmanship of the

[Anna Soubry]

right hon. Lady, we can be absolutely certain that there will be exactly the sort of full inquiry that should take place, with a proper request for the disclosure of documents that will be relevant to that inquiry.

This is a fishing expedition the likes of which I have never seen before. It extends much too far. I was a Minister in three Departments, and I know that it is imperative for civil servants to be able to give robust, open advice to Ministers which would not be shared with others because of its nature. It is also important for Ministers to be able to exchange texts—and we should dig deep into the text in the motion to see the full extent of what would be disclosed, including texts between Ministers and Secretaries of State. That would be ludicrous and it would be bad for government.

Jeremy Quin: I share absolutely my right hon. Friend's concerns about what this does in terms of the relationship between Ministers and civil servants. Does she share my concern that when this information—policy advice—is put out into the public domain those very civil servants who have done their best to serve Ministers have no means to defend themselves in public and to explain what they were intending?

Anna Soubry: Absolutely, and it is imperative that we remember that, with very few, if any, exceptions, civil servants are some of the most outstanding workers in our country. It is too easy to slag them off but we should remember not only their quality, but the fact that often they cannot speak out and defend themselves. Therefore, I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) that the Opposition motion really is not good enough. It is about process and procedure and it does not see people. That is what I want to address my comments to.

The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford was absolutely right when she said that the Windrush scandal has brought great shame on our nation, but some good has come out of this terrible episode in our country's history. People are now at last seeing immigrants as people—as people just like them. They are neighbours. They are people who have come to our country to work and to do the right things. They have often worked in the most outstandingly contributing jobs in our economy and society. They are just like everybody else. They are not numbers; they are real human beings. I think we are already beginning to see a change in some of the opinion polls: thankfully, immigration is now going down the list of priorities as people realise that it is not some corrosive problem, but actually a wonderful, beneficial thing that has occurred in our country for centuries.

The Opposition should have used this opportunity today to talk about the positive benefits that immigration has brought to our country over centuries. Opinion is shifting. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) was on the television and radio the other night saying very openly and bluntly that for too long in my party we have not talked about the positive benefits of immigration. I will go further and say that that has occurred in both our main parties: for too long we have shovelled this away and not talked about it, or we have kowtowed to people

when we should not have done and we should have stood up for immigration and all the huge benefits it conveys.

I want to say to hon. Members in the Labour party and in the SNP—I have a lot of time for the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry)—something about the level of offence. I apologise for being cross and angry sitting on these Back Benches, but I do get cross and I do get angry at some of the comments and slurs that have been made. The idea that there are people on these Benches who have done the wrong thing and said the wrong thing—of course there will always be people who do not always get the right argument, but it is wrong to cast that aspersion. The hon. Member for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock) shakes her head, but she should tread very carefully. I am old enough to remember as a Conservative being a proud member of the Anti-Nazi League, going on the streets—[*Interruption.*] She can listen for once. I remember going on the streets of Birmingham and standing shoulder to shoulder—

Lyn Brown: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Anna Soubry: In a moment; I always give way to the hon. Lady.

I remember standing proudly with members of all political parties, every shade of Trotskyist, communist, broad left, far left, liberals and other Tories. The huge change that has happened in our society is that members of the hard left who shout from sedentary positions have forgotten all that and engage at the level of tribalism on issues that should unite us. That does them and our country a great disservice.

Lyn Brown rose—

Anna Soubry: And now I will take the extra minute.

Lyn Brown: I want to bring the right hon. Lady back to today's debate and read to her from a message that the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants has placed in my inbox:

“Nothing that the government has announced today in parliament will address the root causes of the Windrush scandal—namely the ‘hostile environment’ policy. Hostility is still very much in play, the government still plans to roll Right to Rent out further to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland”.

I really do respect the right hon. Lady, but may I suggest to her that she should understand why we are pressing for a vote tonight and join us in the Lobby to tell her Government how she truly feels?

Anna Soubry: I thank the hon. Lady, but that is not what this motion addresses. It is a bureaucratic, procedural thing. If it had espoused her very good arguments, I would not have any trouble with it, because I want to see change and I absolutely agree with her.

I have been saying to the House for I do not know how long since the Windrush scandal broke that the problem runs deep into the policy. The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford, who chairs the Select Committee, made the point that the policy basically sees everybody as an illegal immigrant. The default position is that people have to prove they are here legally. This shift in responsibility—this shift in the onus of proof—is anti-British and fundamentally wrong. I said the other day that we should perhaps go back to a

system in which the state had to prove that a person had no right to be here. There might be an in-between way, but it cannot be right to have a system in which someone has to prove that they are who they say they are, when they have been here for decades and have a right to be here. That burden of proof must fall on the state. We are certainly seeing a shift in attitude, and I agree that we now need to see a shift in policy.

I am grateful that, just like his predecessor, the Home Secretary has assured us that the Home Office will from now on see people as people, it will not treat them as numbers and it will not see immigration as a problem. I have mentioned the need to shift the onus of proof. I have been saying for a long time that there is a problem, with too many officials having a default position of simply saying no. That has to change. If we are to have a fair and right system of immigration, we need to ensure that discretion and common sense run through the whole culture, from the top right down to the very bottom of the Home Office, in all its work. Also, if I may respectfully suggest this, we need to look at some of the solicitors who deal with immigration cases. I have my own concerns about the level of competence of some of those solicitors, and about the advice they give and the fees they charge.

We should scrap the ambition of reducing immigration to the tens of thousands. Actually, the market controls immigration. People come here to work, and if we do not have the jobs available, they will not come. We need to take students out of the targets—that has been ridiculous—and we need an immigration policy that meets the needs of British business as we leave the European Union. I want an assurance, please, that the Home Office has the people and the resources to ensure that the Windrush scandal does not extend to anyone else, and especially not to European Union citizens.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I have to reduce the time limit to five minutes.

3.52 pm

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Thank you for the warning, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to follow a former member of the Anti-Nazi League. I have always thought that the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) was a bit of a closet pinko; she obviously needs to be looked into by the Conservative Chief Whip. I should like to congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on bringing a proper level of scrutiny to bear on this issue, including the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), and the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper).

In particular, I want to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), who really kick-started this and brought the issue out into the public spotlight. I should like to point out that his predecessor was Bernie Grant, who was a friend of mine. He came here from Guyana—it was British Guyana when he was there—with his head held high, proud of where he came from and proud of where he was going. That is the whole point about this scandal. People like Bernie are now being threatened with

deportation. I say “people like Bernie” because he cannot be threatened with deportation; sadly, he passed away some years ago.

I am dealing with between 30 and 40 cases in my constituency. I have a big Windrush community. As a proportion, I am dealing with a very large number of cases. These are people who have been threatened with deportation, and I will give two brief examples. The first is a woman, and she is a classic Windrush baby case. She came to Britain as a baby in the 1960s, and she cannot remember Jamaica, which is where she was born. She has a broad east London accent, and it is pretty obvious that she is as quintessentially British and a Londoner as anyone else, yet when she went to apply for a passport for the first time in her life, having brought up a family and worked here for all these years, she was told not only that she could not have a passport but that she was going to be deported back to Jamaica. As she said, it is a country that she cannot remember.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

John Cryer: I can't really say no, can I?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. A constituent of mine who came to Britain as a child in 1972 was recently detained upon his return from Jamaica after visiting his father, who has dementia. He told me about his humiliation and that he has had no recourse to public funds since then. He now cannot visit his father again for fear of being detained. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a travesty and that my constituent, along with his, should be afforded the same rights as every other British citizen without further delay?

John Cryer: Of course, I agree.

My second example is more unusual and involves a woman who came from Jamaica when she was a baby. She was abandoned by her parents and grew up in a nunnery, which—Members can tell what is coming—was closed down and demolished after she left, and its records were lost. Again, this is somebody with a broad east London accent. She is quintessentially British and has the right to stay here, but she was told, after she had been through all that, “We're going to deport you.” That is the sort of culture that we are dealing with at the Home Office, and I suspect that it goes across Government, which I will come to in a minute.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I actually agree with the hon. Gentleman. There are aspects of this case that are deeply concerning, and I hope that the Government learn from it. May I suggest that, at the end of the day, we have to protect Government records and civil servants' advice to Governments to ensure that civil servants can give advice with candour? Given that we will have an inquiry, which we all hope will go to the heart of the matter, we should look to it to take the issue back to where it began, which was before 2010.

John Cryer: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the inquiry, but this is an issue of transparency. He and I agree about an awful lot of things, but we are on

[John Cryer]

opposite sides of the fence here. The documents should be put in the public domain. We can redact certain things, such as civil servants' names, but the names of elected people should not be redacted.

Both the cases that I mentioned earlier resulted in victories, but I am dealing with many other cases. Over the past two or three years—this goes back a long way—I have spent an awful lot of time writing to schools, former employers, colleges and the police. In one case I even had to write to the Army to try to check the records to prove that people who had every right to be here could assume that right.

This country has close ties with the Caribbean and with other Commonwealth countries, and we should bear in mind that this debate will be watched across the Commonwealth. Thousands of people will be watching us in countries such as Jamaica, India and Pakistan. Those close ties with the Commonwealth, and with the Caribbean in particular, have their roots in an appalling institution: the empire. It was built on piracy and slavery, but nevertheless the one good thing to come out of that poisonous institution was the Commonwealth, which has always given relatively small countries, often with little political and economic clout, a platform for their voices to be heard, especially here and particularly at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings.

After the war, a series of Governments in this country and in others worked to foster the bonds with the Commonwealth, but those bonds have now been loosened. It is not simply that communities in this country have been given cause to fear what might happen, which is bad enough; we have also undermined relationships with countries across the globe. I never thought I would see the Prime Minister of Jamaica standing in Downing Street, expressing his dismay at the British Government and their policies. That goes way beyond what any previous Jamaican Prime Minister has said, and previous Prime Ministers were fairly critical—I am thinking of Michael Manley and his father Norman. Nobody has expressed such sentiments in the heart of the capital. This Government's job now is to rebuild links with the affected communities and reassure them that they are safe and not under threat. The Government also need—this includes the Foreign Office—to rebuild links with the Commonwealth countries that have had their faith in Britain shattered.

3.59 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): This is a timely and serious debate. We have to acknowledge that the Windrush scandal is a scandal, and we have to acknowledge that mistakes were made. The Government have not been shown in a very good light.

There have been some excellent speeches by Members on both sides of the House, and it is right that we look dispassionately at the issue of immigration. This is not an immigration debate, and very few people on either side of the House would question the fact that immigration is of great benefit to the United Kingdom. My parents both emigrated from a Commonwealth country in the early 1960s, and they are at the centre of what this debate is about.

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) mentioned some harrowing individual cases, and I have heard of other cases, not of constituents but of people in other parts of the capital. I have seen that this has caused a lot of heartache, and it is a very serious issue.

I feel, and many people feel, that the way this issue has been politicised is regrettable. There is a suspicion that not the entire Labour party—many Labour Members have been very honest, capable and sincere in their approach to this problem—but a number of people in it have tried to score political points on a national scandal. I say that because I cannot remember an occasion during my eight years in the House on which both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have issued full apologies for the treatment of British citizens—I cannot remember that happening.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman says we are politicising the issue. It is fine for the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary to apologise, but to address this they need to get rid of their hostile environment policy.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I will come to that later in my speech.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Forgive me, but can I make a little progress?

With respect to the intervention by the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), not only did the former Home Secretary apologise but she resigned over the issue. That is a significant event. It is rare in our politics today that Ministers pay the ultimate price and resign, and that is what has happened.

There is a great deal of contrition, and there have been apologies. Not only that, but a helpline has been put in place to make it as easy as possible for people to find the right documentation. We have also heard about a policy to compensate people who have suffered the excesses of the Home Office. There has been plenty of policy and plenty of speeches, announcements and contrition on the part of the governing party.

I am not suggesting that every Labour Member is exploiting this issue for political ends—I do not believe that at all. I have heard many compelling and sincere speeches, but there is a suspicion that one or two Labour Members are doing so.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I take on board the hon. Gentleman's points about contrition and about the resignation of the former Home Secretary, but surely the issue is the underlying immigration policies—the hostile environment. Can he enlighten us as to whether he and his Back-Bench colleagues challenged some of those policies? He is a Conservative Member and his party is in government. What did he and his colleagues do? I am sure that, like the rest of us, his mailbox is full of constituency cases of people who are being treated in a hostile manner.

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is no secret that the issue of immigration has been a matter of huge debate within the Conservative party. There is a wide range of opinions on the issue on the Government side of the House,

just as there is on the Opposition side of the House. It is an issue on which both sides of the House are divided. Some Government Members want a very open, comprehensive, almost laissez-faire approach to immigration; others want to be more restrictive.

Anna Soubry: It should be put on the record that many of us who were elected in 2010, with the change of government, noticed that under the previous Government there had also been big problems in the Home Office in getting on and doing the right thing in relation to all manner of things—visas, applications and so on. This was nothing new under the Conservative Government.

Kwasi Kwarteng: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Both sides of the House were complicit in this issue. Members have mentioned the Labour Government and a former Labour Prime Minister who suggested that British jobs should be restricted to British workers. If he had been a Conservative Prime Minister, that comment would have caused outrage and would have been widely regarded as a disgraceful comment. That was the environment in which many of us operated when we were elected in 2010. All of us have to take some degree of responsibility for this.

In my closing remarks, I want to talk about something that has been mentioned: illegal immigration. Many Opposition Members have suggested that Conservative Members were trying to conflate illegal immigration with legal immigration. We were doing the opposite; everyone said, categorically, that the Windrush generation had an incontestable right to stay in Britain, as they are British. No one on this side of the House has ever questioned their legal status. What we have said is that we need a strong policy on illegal immigration—after all, it is against the law. It is a principal job of Government to uphold the law, so any Government, of whatever stripe, would need robust and strong policies to counter illegal immigration. People should not be embarrassed about that, as we are talking about the job of Government. Many millions of people who live in this country—probably the vast majority of our constituents—would expect a rules-based system to regulate how one comes into the country.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that those with some of the loudest and most articulate voices in favour of a robust and fair approach are people who have come to this country and played by the rules in the first place?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I suggest we take a much more rounded approach to the issue. There is blame on both sides. I cannot condone what my Government have done in the past on Windrush, and I sincerely hope and pray that our performance is much better on this issue in the future, because the Government will ultimately be judged on how we resolve it. The whole country, like others across the world in the Commonwealth, is looking at us, and we have to acquit ourselves with dignity and competence.

4.7 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this incredibly important debate. A lot has been said today and over the past week or so about this scandal, but I

still feel that there are not words strong enough to describe how awful, appalling, heartbreaking and profoundly un-British this whole scandal has been. I associate myself with all the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary in her opening speech. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the chair of the Home Affairs Committee, and, in particular, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) on the tremendous work they have done on bringing this issue to light.

This is a horrendous, horrible moment, not just for the Windrush generation and their children but for all of us in our collective national life, and it will have an enduring legacy. If we choose, and if the Government listen, it could be a positive legacy that helps us to move forward in a way that is in the best of our British traditions of fairness, decency and a desire to do the right thing. In that context, I say to Home Office Ministers that they should take heed of our motion and simply release the paperwork. If there is an issue as to how extensive the wording of the motion is, they should work with either the shadow Front-Bench team or the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee to come to a wording that is acceptable and to bring forward the disinfected that is sunlight.

Jeremy Quin: I do not think the hon. Lady understands the import of the motion. If the motion is passed, the papers are required to be given; it is a resolution of the House. Then the Government would have to comply, I presume, with the orders of the Humble Address. It is not an invitation to treat or to discuss.

Shabana Mahmood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, but as we all know in this place, there are always the usual channels for discussions to be had, and if there was ever a moment for the usual channels and for discussions to be had, I would say that in resolving this most important national matter, this would be the time. It is open to the Government at any point to work with those of us who want the paperwork released, so that we can get to the bottom of what happened and truly learn lessons, and move forward in a way that would honour the Windrush generation and put right what they have suffered. That is what needs to happen.

I welcome the move today to provide legal certainty about how the Windrush generation will be treated in their future applications, but I ask Home Office Ministers to consider giving those citizens access to legal aid and good-quality legal advice as they try to regularise their status. I say that because the absence of legal aid has pushed people towards rapacious and terrible solicitors who give bad advice, and because simply saying, “We have put this on a legal footing and now you can trust the Home Office,” is not enough for people who are still too scared to come forward. The Government have lost the trust of a generation. I know people who, despite my personal assurances, are still too afraid to come forward. A simple legal and legislative change will not be enough. They need access to independent legal advice, and they need financial help for the purpose.

I shall make a couple of general remarks on illegal immigration. Some Conservative Members attempted to ask the Opposition, “What would you do about illegal immigration?” We dishonour the Windrush

[*Shabana Mahmood*]

generation if we make this a debate about illegal immigration, and if we miss the point about the culture of disbelief that fuels the hostile environment, which, as the scandal has shown, sits at the heart of what has happened. It is that culture of disbelief that renders British citizens and British nationals as if they were not just immigrants but illegal too. It visits upon them the ignominy and humiliation of being deemed illegal in their own land. That assumption, which is made at the heart of our system, does not simply go after illegal immigrants; as we have said, it goes after those of us who look like we could be immigrants. We have talked a lot about illegal immigration sitting at the heart of this debate, but what we are not talking about so much is race.

I say to hon. Members who do not quite understand how these policies impact on their fellow citizens and their fellow British nationals: try making an application to the Home Office while having a name that is demonstrably African in origin. Try making an application, as a British national, to the Home Office with a name that is demonstrably south Asian in origin. I promise that the protection of a British passport will not help one little bit. People will have visited upon them casual humiliation upon humiliation. The system will treat them as if they were dirt on the bottom of its shoe, and that is not good enough.

That happens to British nationals on a daily basis when they apply for visitor visas or spousal visas. If they can get past the income threshold and prove the legitimacy of their love for somebody they fallen in love with and married, the system still makes them take a DNA test to prove that a child who might have been born while they visited their foreign-based spouse is in fact their child. That is not acceptable in 21st-century Britain. I say to Government Members: do not be complacent about what your system is doing on a daily basis to people who have the protection of a British passport. If you are in any doubt, come to see me in my constituency, which is 70% non-white. I have one of the highest immigration caseloads in this country and I see this daily. If you have illusions about this, I suggest that you disabuse yourselves of them straightaway.

This is a moment of national truth—of clarity. It is a moment when we can make a choice to have a better debate about immigration. It is a moment that we must not allow to be missed. We will honour the Windrush generation if we move forward in a way that is humane, that is compassionate, and that acknowledges the truth of the failures at the heart of our system and seeks to put them right.

4.13pm

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (*Shabana Mahmood*), my fellow marathon runner. My remarks will share in the sentiment of the early part of hers, because I come at this debate considering myself very lucky to have grown up in a diverse community. In Wellingborough, I grew up with Afro-Caribbean families. I grew up with Asian families. They have played a huge part in our community; they have contributed so much. They are absolutely British, and they are here legally; let us be in no doubt about that.

I take great offence at any suggestion that not all Members of the House are concerned about this issue or that not all Members take the matter incredibly seriously or want it resolved as quickly as possible. I do not think that anybody would say that something has not gone seriously wrong here—it is impossible to deny that something has gone seriously wrong—but I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (*Anna Soubry*) that nobody has set about deliberately targeting the Windrush generation. Again, it is wrong to give the impression that that is the case, and I take issue with it.

It is right, therefore, that a full and frank apology is made, and we have seen a full and frank apology made on numerous occasions. What matters more than any of that, though, is action. This is about speedy action being taken, which is why I welcome the package of measures announced by Ministers in recent days, because they are comprehensive.

Having had constituents contact me who are concerned that they have been affected by this issue, my experience as a constituency MP is that they have been dealt with thoroughly and speedily to reach a resolution in their case. I have seen a system that has been put in place being responsive to dealing with these cases. Of course, this should never have happened, but these cases have been dealt with in a way that I would like them to be dealt with, and dealt with properly. I do not want anybody to be worrying about this for any longer than is necessary.

When the statement was made last week, I pushed the former Home Secretary on the two-week target. She was confident that it would hold, which is really important. I will certainly be monitoring progress against that.

I also welcome what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary had to say today about the new measures around transparency that he is going to introduce. I welcome the fact that the Home Affairs Committee is going to be getting the information that it has requested, and when we look at my right hon. Friend's record, certainly in dealing with the Grenfell issue, we can see that he has been incredibly sympathetic, incredibly thorough and always incredibly forthcoming in dealing with the issues—not just those raised by Members of the House, but those raised by the survivors. That is absolutely right, and I know that he will pursue this with vigour, robustly and thoroughly.

The truth is that the motion will do absolutely nothing to help any of that. This is a procedural motion. I wanted to intervene on the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (*Ms Abbott*), the shadow Home Secretary, to make the point that if we are serious about this, why refer to the date May 2010? The fact that certain policies were enacted under the last Labour Government has been well documented in the media, so why are Labour Members not interested in getting to grips with the information from before that date? It would have been a much more genuine attempt had that been the case.

Mrs Main: That is exactly the point that I was trying to make. This is quite obviously a fishing exercise between certain chosen dates, and I have to say that if Labour Members were honestly trying to get to the truth, they would be looking at the whole number of dates covered by this policy.

Tom Pursglove: I agree with that analysis, and the approach that has been adopted is disappointing. It seems to me that Ministers are thoroughly engaging with the Home Affairs Committee anyway, and were engaging properly with the Committee before the motion was even tabled.

I want to touch on immigration policy and will start by saying that, of course—I have made this point previously and I make it again—the Windrush generation and members of that generation should never, ever have been caught up in the measures that have, in the end, affected them. I come at the issue of immigration policy as someone who campaigned in the referendum to leave and as someone who, yes, wants to see control, but also wants fairness in our immigration policy. I think fairness is the more important point.

If we asked my constituents in Corby and east Northamptonshire, they would say that a common-sense immigration policy is one that treats people equally, regardless of where they come from in the world, and treats people the same whether they come from the Caribbean, the subcontinent or the European Union. That is where I would like to get to at the end of this Brexit process. That is the immigration policy that I would like to see, obviously with a big consideration of the skills that are required in our economy as part of it.

But let me also say that we have to deal with illegal immigration robustly and properly. Of course we have to deal with it humanely and speedily, but the main reason we have to deal with it thoroughly, properly and robustly is that if we do not do so, it penalises those who come here legally, follow the rules and go through the right route.

To my mind, we must, first and foremost, put right what has gone wrong—no ifs, no buts. As one House, we should all be united in that resolve.

4.19 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): At its heart this motion is about the hostile environment, and that is why so many of us are here this afternoon. The Home Secretary has committed himself to a “fair and humane” immigration policy. In my view, it is not possible to have a fair and humane immigration policy alongside the hostile environment. That is a paradox and a total contradiction in terms. He has said that he wants to move from a hostile environment to a compliant environment. Let us think about what compliant means.

Compliant means to obey rules to an excessive degree. Compliant means the action or fact of complying with a command. I say to the new Home Secretary: has he forgotten our history? I remind the House that I am here because you were there. I say “you” metaphorically. The Windrush generation are here because of slavery. The Windrush story is the story of British empire. And the Windrush community and its ancestors know what hostile and compliance mean. We know what compliance means. It is written deep into our souls and passed down from our ancestors. Slaves having to nod and smile when they were being whipped in a cotton field or a sugar cane field were compliant. Watching your partner being tied to a tree, beaten or raped on a plantation is compliance. Twelve million people being transported as slaves from Africa to the colonies is a compliant environment.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Lammy: I will not.

Windrush citizens being abused, spat on and assaulted in the street but never once fighting back was a compliant environment. Black Britons being racially abused at work but never speaking up because they need to put food on the table know all about a compliant environment. Turning the other cheek when the National Front were marching through our streets was a compliant environment. Young black men being stopped and searched by the police, despite committing no crime and living in fear of the police, know what it is like to be in a compliant environment. And thank God that Doreen Lawrence defied that compliant environment.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend says, the terminology does not help. Does he agree that we also need a change of policy to get to the root causes of why this happened in the first place and to prevent it from happening again?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is exactly right.

I want to make it absolutely clear that it is my view that this belief about a compliant environment goes all the way back to the Slavery Abolition Act 1833. This Parliament provided compensation, worth £17 billion today and paid for by the British taxpayer, to the 46,000 British slave owners for the loss of their property. The slaves got nothing. And now their descendants are being shackled and chained, dragged on to deportation flights and sent back across the same ocean that Britain took their ancestors from in slave ships centuries ago.

Stephen Doughty: As ever, my right hon. Friend is speaking with incredible words, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood). Was my right hon. Friend as shocked as I was yesterday to hear the new Home Secretary say that he was not aware of any cases of wrongful deportation? Many such cases have been raised in public, let alone the incidents of wrongful detention. I have a letter here from the Home Office that admits that one of my own constituents—a British citizen—was wrongfully deported. Is he surprised by that?

Mr Lammy: I am staggered by it because there are thousands of people in the Caribbean who have lost their jobs and livelihoods, and are desperate to get back to their loved ones. But we still have no numbers from this Government.

I stood in this place five years ago and warned about the impact of the hostile environment. I told the then Home Secretary that her Bill was a stain on our democracy. In recent weeks, we have seen how the Windrush scandal has become a stain on our democracy and on our national conscience. I warned about the impact of a policy that would take us back to the days of “No Irish, no blacks, no dogs.” I stood in this place five years ago and read from Magna Carta, the foundation of our democracy, which says:

“No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled...nor will we proceed with force against him...except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.”

[Mr Lammy]

Yesterday, in a Committee Room in the Palace of Westminster, we heard testimony from British citizens who have been seized and imprisoned, who have been stripped of their rights, who have been outlawed or exiled, and who have been treated like criminals in their own country. So I ask the Minister: how many more Windrush scandals do we need before this hostile environment, or indeed compliant environment, is scrapped? How many more injustices? How many more lives ruined? Because I will be back here in five years' time if we continue down this road to great injustices in our own country.

In recent weeks, we have seen so many Government Ministers and Members of the House talk about the issue of illegal immigration, conflating illegal immigration and the Windrush crisis. This is symptomatic of the hostile environment and its corrosive impact. What we have seen in this House, with Members standing up to talk about illegal immigration, is a perfect metaphor for the hostile environment and how it works: a blurring of the lines between people who are here legally and illegal immigrants, scapegoating innocent people, and blaming immigrants for the failures of successive Governments. Toxic anti-immigrant rhetoric created the demand for the hostile environment. Then we got a divisive policy handed down by our current Prime Minister, pandering to prejudice and aided and abetted by a hateful dog whistle emanating from our tabloid press. This was all reinforced by politicians too craven to speak the truth about immigration and too cowardly to stand up for the rights of minorities. Conservative Members want to lecture us about illegal immigration. The hostile environment is not about illegal immigration. The hostile environment is about raising questions about the status of anybody who looks like they could be an immigrant. It is about treating anybody who looks like they could be an immigrant as if they are a criminal.

Where does the hostile environment get us to? Let me tell you. It leads to cases in my own constituency of people being dragged out of their homes, going to Yarl's Wood, and not able to do midwifery exams. It leads to people losing their jobs and their livelihoods. So I say to Conservative Members and Members across this House, on behalf of the Windrush generation: keep in mind that spiritual and let freedom reign. It will only reign when this country turns back from the path it is on, ends the compliant environment in which I know my place, and starts along a humane path that has at its heart human rights. [Applause.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The right hon. Gentleman has made a terrifically rhetorical speech and he deserves to be congratulated, but not by clapping. Could the House just say "Hear, hear"?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

4.27 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I would like to address the motion on the Order Paper, because that is what we are here to talk about. Would that the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, were on the Opposition Front Bench. She actually spoke to the

motion, and with great knowledge. I was disappointed that the shadow Home Secretary did not address the motion as the right hon. Lady did. She seemed to spend three quarters of her speech—

Ms Abbott rose—

Mrs Main: I am afraid that I will not take any interventions from the shadow Home Secretary, as she absolutely steadfastly refused to recognise the requests of any Conservative Members and did not give way in any way, shape or form. If she would like to take a bit of her own medicine—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) is standing at the Dispatch Box, but the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) has said that she is not taking an intervention. [Interruption.] It is not for me to decide; there is no point in the right hon. Lady appealing to me.

Mrs Main: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall not be taking any interventions from the shadow Home Secretary, since she did not extend that courtesy to Conservative Members.

As I said, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford got to the nub of this debate. We have to ask ourselves whether documentation is needed for the Home Affairs Committee to do its business. I think that it probably is. I think she will be diligent in that task. As I said, I would like to see the information taken from the range of documentation.

Yvette Cooper: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. I gently point out to her that the point I made was that it was not a matter for the Select Committee, but a matter for the House, to make a decision on the motion, and that we would choose how to respond. Although we have put our own questions to the Home Office, most of them are still unanswered. Clearly she will have her own points to make, but I ask her not to pray in aid my arguments.

Mrs Main: I take the point, and I hope the right hon. Lady gets the answers that she deserves. I think that all Conservative Members feel that the Windrush generation have been done a huge disservice. To conflate this debate with other forms of immigration, slavery and whatever else people have chucked into the mix, including fishing, does a disservice to the debate we must have about the wrongs that were done in the processing of the Windrush generation.

Mr Lammy: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Main: No, I will not give way on that point.

We need to look at the process and truly analyse it. Heartfelt apologies have been made, which is absolutely correct. Anyone whose life has been disrupted—I do not dispute that many have been—deserves that apology, but we need to look at how it went wrong and what went wrong and make sure that compensation, if appropriate, is given. No Conservative Members would say any differently. The people of this generation are here absolutely legally, and we need to ensure that their position is corrected, so that neither they nor their children or family in future have any of these issues.

However, the motion before us is about how much protection is given to the people who advise those in government. This wide-ranging text, mentioning Ministers, senior officials, special advisers and so on, makes such an onerous and invasive request. If this request was taken to the nth degree on every contentious topic—for example, the invasion of Iraq—where would it end? How can a Government get the information they need and think outside the box, and how can text messages be sent between Ministers, if they believe that nothing can be said within Cabinet that cannot at any time be requested in an Opposition day motion?

If there are papers that show how this process came to happen in the way it did, I hope they are brought forward, as the Home Affairs Committee has requested, but this motion goes to the nth degree of asking for “advice” to be published—what sort of advice? Does that include oral advice, minutes taken, emails and text messages? The motion also mentions “all papers” and “correspondence”, but it is only for the selective dates that the Opposition feel may be helpful to their cause. This is not the way to sort out a problem that has occurred over decades. This problem must be put right, and I believe the Home Secretary has the passion to put it right.

The semantics and picking apart of the word “compliant” are ridiculous. Most Conservative Members would agree that the Home Secretary is a man of great compassion who cares deeply about—

Mr Lammy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have had to cope with the hon. Lady saying that we cannot link the Windrush generation to slavery. I have had now to cope with her suggesting that my “Oxford English Dictionary” definition of “compliance” in my speech was wrong. Can she correct the record?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand that passions are running high, but the right hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for the Chair. He has made his point. The hon. Lady may address it if she wishes to, but it is up to her.

Mrs Main: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I simply said that we have had everything thrown into this debate, apart from a discussion of the impact of what the motion would deliver.

As I was saying, I believe that our new Home Secretary is a compassionate and caring man. The fact that he has been called a “coconut”, and all the other things he has had to endure in the short time he has been in office, just goes to show that we do not live in the tolerant society that I would like to live in. The fact that he has the dignity to address those comments in the Chamber but still not be deterred from doing the right thing by the Windrush generation is to his great credit, and long may he do so.

I do not think that this debate has been characterised by good temper on both sides. When the shadow Secretary of State will not give way to anyone, it certainly does not make for a debate; rather, it makes for a one-sided monologue read from notes. The implication of the motion is so far ranging and so constraining on any future Government that it would be very dangerous to go along this route. The Windrush generation has been

done a great disservice, but apologies have been made. I hope that there is a swift resolution, and I believe that under the current Government there will be.

4.35 pm

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Windrush generation came to our country in the post-war period to help to rebuild Britain. They have made our nation great, and they are part of us. They are British citizens regardless of whether or not they have the paperwork to prove so.

I first became aware of the appalling and inhumane treatment of the Windrush generation last October, when my constituent Paulette Wilson was detained at Yarl’s Wood and then taken to Heathrow detention centre, before being released at the 11th hour, after I had intervened, as had the Refugee and Migrant Centre in Wolverhampton. Paulette believed she was going to be put on a plane to Jamaica—a country she had not been to for 50 years, since she was 10 years old.

Paulette has worked all of her life in the UK, including serving food to Members of Parliament in this place, and she has paid 34 years of national insurance contributions. She has raised a daughter, and she now has a granddaughter. For weeks after her release, she found it difficult to sleep or eat. I want to press the Government on the compensation scheme. I know that they have to be careful and that it has to be got right, but I hope that they will bring it forward quickly and that she is properly compensated.

It pains me that it has taken so long for this scandal to come to light. Why did it take the detention of my constituent and the appalling treatment of many others—they thought they were isolated cases until somebody linked them together—as well as the work and determination of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), the intervention of the Church of England bishops, the pressure from several Caribbean high commissioners and Heads of Government, and the work of a dedicated journalist at *The Guardian* to join up the dots?

The Home Secretary today announced an internal review into what went wrong. If that is to be meaningful, it must identify the root causes of this scandal. This is not about scoring party political points, but about focusing on preventing this from ever happening again and on rebuilding trust not only with the Windrush generation but with others who have come from the Commonwealth over the years and the EU migrants who have come more recently. I hope—I sincerely hope—that the Government will be honest and open about why what happened to Paulette took place, and why so many others have also been caught up.

I have heard some Government Members describe this as an administrative oversight, but I do not believe that to be the case. If it were just an error, why did it happen to so many different people in different parts of the UK? Others have tried to blame civil servants, as if what Ministers do and say has no bearing on their Department. The truth is that Ministers make policy and civil servants are there to carry out their policies. Ministers set targets and expect civil servants to deliver on those targets.

We have to look closely at the hostile environment policy introduced by the Prime Minister when she was Home Secretary. This included making landlords,

[Emma Reynolds]

doctors and employers unwilling border guards, setting an unrealistic net migration target of getting immigration down to the tens of thousands and removing legal aid and the right of appeal on NTL—no time limit—applications.

We have recently learned that there have been internal regional targets for removal. The former Home Secretary denied their existence, and said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and members of the Home Affairs Committee:

“that’s not how we operate”.

We now know that she was wrong about the existence of such targets—they do exist—but what she said about not operating in that way was absolutely right. It is absurd and immoral to have removal targets for migrants. It has fostered a culture of disbelief and of treating people as numbers, not human beings.

We need an honest appraisal of what went wrong, to prevent this from happening again and to have any chance of building a fair and humane immigration policy, as the Home Secretary declared he wants to build. Let us learn the lessons, and let us make sure that our immigration policy is in line with British values and the country in which we live.

4.40 pm

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I want to keep my words short. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds).

I would like to comment on the words of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) because he said that it may be five years before he is back here fighting this cause. I hope it is not that length of time because, while I disagreed with some of the sentiments in what he said, it is important that the whole House pays tribute to the work and dedication he has put in to draw attention to an issue that should never have been there. Without his hard work and dedication—it was probably very frustrating at times—I certainly would not have known about this issue, and the *Guardian* journalist would not have known about it. So tribute has to be paid to the right hon. Gentleman, and I am sure his constituents are very proud of the work he has done on their behalf.

This is an opportunity for us to celebrate the rich diversity that the Windrush generation have brought to our shores. Regardless of whether we are talking about the first generation, their children or, in many cases, their grandchildren, we have to recognise them for the benefits they have brought. If we visit a health service in this country, it is almost impossible not to find examples of where those have been enriched by what has come to our shores. That is incredibly welcome.

It is important that we use this opportunity to learn from what has been a shocking example of failure. Whether it was deliberate or accidental, people were let down and betrayed. That was an absolutely shocking stain on a great Department of State. I really hope that Ministers and officials, regardless of party, reflect on the decisions they took and make sure that we learn from this, move forward and never make systematic mistakes again.

We are entering a period when we will be dealing with vast numbers of EU nationals, which, again, will potentially throw up lots of complications and questions. We have to make sure that we draw on what has happened, to ensure that the rights and protections for those people, their children, their spouses and so on are honoured and respected.

I would like to pick up on the remarks made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) about immigration solicitors, because a huge amount of work needs to be done. Many of these solicitors work honestly and openly, and do a great job for those who come to see them, but there are others who do not. There are others who are not fully qualified. There are others who seek to charge exorbitant fees to people who often cannot afford to pay them. There are others who give people bad advice and who send them on a runaround. Very quick bits of advice could solve an issue, but some of these solicitors would rather look the other way and tie people into horrendous, horrific contracts that often leave them in penury. I would say to Ministers that, if there is no work being done on immigration solicitors, it needs to be done, because many vulnerable people are paying an awful price.

I hope that we are able to come together to sort the mess of Windrush and to ensure that immigration policy in this country is fair and balanced, regardless of the colour of someone’s skin or where they are from. I hope that we are able to ensure that it reflects them as an individual and the contribution we believe they can make to our country.

This is a moment when we can move forward. I encourage Ministers to continue in the way they have been doing in recent weeks. If we get this right, tens of thousands of people—not hundreds of people—will be grateful. We should be sorry for the people who have paid a horrific price, but we should be thanking those who have shone a light on what is an unmitigated disaster and who are putting a wrong right.

4.44 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) for the tone he adopted in his speech. That is exactly the tone that the House should have seen throughout this debate.

We have to learn from this appalling scandal. We have to think about what it means for our immigration system and how we treat people—I repeat: how we treat people. Legal or illegal, they are people and we should treat them fairly and with justice. I say to Conservative Members that, when *Hansard* comes out tomorrow, they should re-read the speeches by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) and the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). I found them very insightful. They spoke from the heart and from experience. I do not have the immigration case load of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood, but I have a quite a number of cases and she talked about issues that I have seen in my surgeries far too frequently. There is a huge and systemic problem with the Home Office and it has to be put right.

The right hon. Member for Tottenham talked about what people are feeling out there: what real people are feeling, their emotions. If we do not hear that in the House, we will never get to the bottom of this problem. I say to Ministers and Conservative Members: just think. Yes, the motion is strong in terms of the amount of information it asks for, but that is right because it is proportionate to the level of scandal we are facing. It is proportionate to the work we have to do to get this thing right. I have faith in the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and the Home Affairs Committee to look at that information and use it with judicious skill. If we can come together, we can really learn the lessons and find out what has gone wrong.

I am pleased at the period of time proposed in the motion. It includes a period of time when my party was in government. I am very happy for all that to be considered. I gently say to Labour colleagues that I wish the motion went a bit further, because we need to learn everything, but I will vote for it tonight. It talks about transparency and openness, and that is where we have to go.

I hope the Minister will say a little more about who it is we are helping, as that is currently too vague for my liking. The Windrush generation? Commonwealth citizens? Can we be more specific? We need to know exactly who will be helped by the unit and the new rules. Unless we do that, we will find other injustices. We need to get it right, so we need the detail. We know how much Home Office officials focus on the detail. If we are going to hold them to account for this system, we need detail from the Minister.

I urge the Government to not stop at Commonwealth citizens. There are people who have been in this country from all over the world for many, many years. I am dealing with a Moroccan who came to this country in 1973. His papers were lost in a fire in the place in which he worked in 1978. He is now homeless and suffering from cancer. He has no recourse to public funds and the Home Office does not take any notice of the letters I write. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame!"] It is shameful. We really have to start thinking about these people as human beings. The Government have to realise that even if the Prime Minister is caught up in this and it emerges that she was told about the problems facing the Windrush generation when she was Home Secretary and did nothing, that is too bad. She will have to be held to account for that. We need the openness.

We will be debating an amendment to the Data Protection Bill on 9 May. The Government are putting forward a Bill with an immigration exemption so that people, including British citizens, will not be able to have access to their immigration file held by the Home Office. Home Office officials will be able to say, "No, you can't see it." That is a recipe for a cover-up and the next Windrush scandal. That clause must be removed. This House must vote against it on 9 May.

There are so many things wrong with our immigration system. We have heard this week about visas not being given to the NHS doctors we need to help our people. We have heard about foreign students who have been expelled against the rule of law. There is so much that is wrong. If the Government do not understand that and ignore what the editor of the *Daily Mail* says, I am afraid our country will not come together in the way that it should.

4.49 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). On Monday, we had a first-class debate in the quiet environment of Westminster Hall. All of us who took part, including particularly though not exclusively the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), spoke to the heart of the issue and said what a number of colleagues on both sides of the House have said this afternoon: we are talking about people—people with aspirations, needs, family and commitments. Very often we reduce things too much by talking about a battery of statistics, telephone numbers and all the rest of it, and we lose sight of the fact that we are talking about people and their hopes and aspirations. Unfortunately, the motion and—I say this with the greatest respect to the shadow Home Secretary—the tone and manner in which she introduced the motion were not conducive to our seeing a replication of the debate that we had in Westminster Hall.

I say this not to be particularly partisan, but I think there is a very clear disconnect on this issue between the Opposition Front Benchers and their Back Benchers. Their Back Benchers are talking about people; they are talking about the principles that underpin their stances and objectives. The motion before us, which probably has very little to do with what many of our speeches have been predicated on, is all about politics and the process of politics. I would assert, I hope without contradiction, that most people who are affected by this issue really do not give a damn about the process. They just want to get it sorted out.

Legitimate questions have been asked, such as, "If we call up the Home Office number, and so on, will we compromise ourselves?", and I hope that all of us feel that we have a duty to take back to our friends and constituents the fact that on this issue, the Government have recognised that there has been an error. The error has not necessarily been solely authored by this Government—it goes back to the end of the Blair-Brown era—but the people affected need confidence that the Government and the House are now on their side. They need to have confidence in the robustness, honesty and integrity of what Ministers say, whether that is in the media or at the Dispatch Box. If we decide, through narrow partisan political interest, to play politics with those people's lives because we think that it might nudge us up one point or another in the opinion polls, that will let down our constituents.

Part of the problem, and I make no apology for rehearsing the point that I made on Monday, is that—

Yvette Cooper: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hoare: Of course I will.

Yvette Cooper: I listened to the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful words earlier this week as well, but I really would ask him to withdraw some of the things that he has said about the Labour Front Benchers and the approach that they are taking, and in particular, about the shadow Home Secretary, who has been a passionate advocate for individuals who have been badly affected by the Windrush crisis. By all means, disagree with the motion, if the hon. Gentleman takes a different view,

[Yvette Cooper]

but I strongly urge him to withdraw the points about the shadow Home Secretary's motive and approach, given the speech that she made earlier.

Simon Hoare: I say to the right hon. Lady that nobody in this House would doubt—let us be frank about this—the sincerity with which the shadow Home Secretary has faced fighting racism and abuse in this country. She is a leader in the field. I say to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, that if only the motion had reflected that, because it does not—it is about process.

As I said on Monday, at the back of all our minds, on the Government Benches and on the Opposition Benches, there is probably a little echo of guilt. Whether it was UKIP, the BNP or some of the more excessive narratives of our tabloid press, issues of “asylum” and “refugee”, “illegal” and “legal”, got conflated with “them” and “us”, “foreign” and “different”, “alien” and “domestic”. All of us, looking to our political bases, became anxious about seeing our support nibbled away, and instead of making the positive, liberal case for the contribution that immigrants make—the case made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and by my constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), on “Newsnight” on Monday—we ran away from those uncomfortable conversations on the doorstep. All of us—all of us—probably wish we had been a little more robust in making that positive case. That we did not make it is no excuse for not facing it now.

The Windrush generation answered our call in time of war and in time of peace, and the Government will answer their call to find a solution to this issue. Members on both sides of the House with equal passion owe all their constituents a duty to support that endeavour and to get it right—for people.

4.56 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I want to talk about trust and how it has been violated, and I want to start with the cases of my constituents Gem and Jessica, both of which I raised in Monday's debate in Westminster Hall.

Gem arrived here from Jamaica, Jessica from Dominica. Both have worked here, paying taxes and raising families, for nearly 50 years, and both have fallen victim to the Government's hostile environment. Jessica has served our community in West Ham, working for a charity helping refugees and migrants, so what an irony that in March she was fired from that job because she could not prove her right to work. The lesson of the Windrush scandal is that the hostile environment strategy is, in and of itself, a breach of trust. The betrayal of people like Gem and Jessica will not end until that strategy changes.

The hostile environment violates the rightful, reasonable, normal expectations that the people of Britain share. We expect not to be treated with suspicion, like criminals, without very good reason. We expect not to be threatened with destitution, or to be divided from our families or communities, without very good reason. We expect that our voices and our contributions to our country will

not be dismissed by our Government without extremely good reason. But those expectations were violated for our British Windrush citizens—their trust was violated. These citizens were stopped at the GP reception, the police station, the bank counter, the workplace, the jobcentre—all those places became hostile environments for Jessica, Gem and many others.

Papers are demanded—papers that many do not have—and when Windrush citizens cannot produce these papers, they are plunged into a nightmare of hostile demands and constant suspicion, and behind it all is the threat of deportation and the destruction of their lives, with jobs, housing and healthcare yanked away. We all know the consequences: homelessness, detention, depression, mental illness, suicide and bereavement. People like Jessica and Gem have been denied the decent, dignified, fair treatment that all of us have a right to expect. They have been treated like criminals without reason and denied redress without reason. Legal aid, tribunals, access to justice—all cut. Their trust in their country has been breached and cannot easily be restored.

There is massive anxiety in my community about immigration removal flights that may have British Windrush citizens on board. In particular, I am told of flight PVT070. I have asked about this in recent days, as have my colleagues, but despite ministerial assurances, anxieties remain. Can Ministers at the Home Office imagine just how badly they will have further betrayed the trust of generations if they fail to get a grip on this and British citizens are again deported?

Let me finish by echoing what my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) said. The Windrush generation are British. They have always been British. Recognising their rights is justice. It is not generosity. I am tired of hearing that “they” came here to help “us”. In the community in which I grew up, there is no “us” of which Gem and Jessica are not a part. The Windrush generation did not come to help “us”; they are “us”. In serving our country all their lives, they have helped to build the communities that we share.

On Monday, in Westminster Hall, I spoke about how personal this is—and it is. Lucy and Cecil are my brother-in-law's parents. They are good people. They are Windrush people. Lucy served for decades as an NHS nurse. They and their family, including me, are furious about the way in which the Government have treated British citizens. Sometimes when we are in this place talking about personal stuff, we struggle to find the right words and the right tone, but I hope that I have done them justice today.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I want to make every effort to enable as many colleagues as possible to speak, so I shall now reduce the speaking time limit to four minutes.

5.1 pm

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown). I think that she found absolutely the right words to express the human tragedy of this case, and I congratulate her on her powerful speech. Like her, I have been in the Chamber holding the Government to account when there have been urgent questions and statements about

this issue, and like the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds), I am seeking—as my questions will confirm—the swift implementation, after consultation, of an effective and appropriate compensation scheme.

The House has every right, indeed a duty, to hold the Government to account. I hope that had the motion concerned the substance of policy, the mistakes for which the Government have apologised and the details of compensation and restitution, my contribution to the debate would have been no less sincere and no less demanding than that of any other Member in upholding the rights of our fellow citizens, to which I know the Government are also committed. However, that is not the motion that the Opposition have chosen to debate. Many speakers have not focused on the motion, but have discussed the Windrush affair more generally. I do not blame them for doing so—it is an issue that rightly excites fierce passions—but the House must be cognisant of what the motion actually says.

The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) set out a list of items of information, some of which I thought were quite reasonable, and most of which I thought she could access by means of parliamentary questions or freedom of information requests. However, she has resorted to a deeply archaic mechanism involving vastly wide-ranging powers and implications. The power that the motion invokes predates our Select Committees. It predates the routine questioning of Ministers on the Floor of the House. It predates freedom of information requests by centuries. It is not designed for a trawl through eight years-worth of text messages. In my view, it has been superseded by the freedom of information legislation introduced by the last Labour Government, with the checks and balances that that wisely incorporates.

I appreciate that neither the right hon. Lady nor the Leader of the Opposition has been a Minister with civil servants to advise them. However, having served on secondment in the civil service, I cannot emphasise too strongly how fortunate we are as a country to have a cadre of extremely experienced, independent civil servants, eager to do their utmost to provide the Government of the day with the best possible advice. I am deeply concerned by the precedent that the motion sets, not because of the position in which it places Ministers but because of the position in which it places decent public servants who do their utmost to support any incumbent Government.

The motion makes a number of demands. First, it demands the release of all papers, correspondence, text messages and advice on a set policy area over an eight-year period. I find it hard to think of a precedent that could be more injurious to good government and good advice. The motion makes it absolutely clear that through this mechanism, confidential advice destined for Ministers can be passed on. We are not talking about final policy, chewed over, discussed and determined by a Minister. We are talking about the range of options and recommendations provided by civil servants to aid the Minister in that analysis. The civil servants concerned have no means of defending themselves if this information is released into the public domain. I implore the House not to establish a precedent whereby our senior civil servants shy away from telling the truth to power.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Having worked in a Government Department and having had to produce papers for Ministers, does my hon. Friend agree that the failure to have any record to go back on means that there is no historical precedent, which affects future decision making?

Jeremy Quin: My hon. Friend is right: it puts civil servants in an invidious position. I would never discuss any advice that I might have been privy to in those days, but this puts civil servants in the most horrendous position. As I said to the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), there are many Opposition Members who served their country with distinction in government. Before they vote to establish this precedent, I ask them to consider what the implications would have been for the men and women providing them with advice to the best of their ability, and for the advice that they might have received.

This wide-ranging motion would set a deeply damaging precedent. What makes it even worse is that it incorporates confidential advice directly relating to our relationship with other independent states, and in its last line it might even be encroaching on the minutes of a Cabinet Sub-Committee, which risks undermining the basis of collective Cabinet responsibility.

We all want to ensure justice for the Windrush victims, but I do not believe the motion is a responsible way to go about achieving that.

5.6 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The Windrush scandal has sent shockwaves through this country, and so it should. British citizens, men and women who were raised here, who built their lives here, who helped to rebuild this country—their country—after the devastation of the second world war, have been denied their basic human rights. They have been denied their rights as citizens to healthcare, housing, their pensions and social security, and in some cases they have lost their jobs. Some have even been deported in error—an error that has ripped apart lives, families and friendships.

Up to 50,000 British citizens have been too fearful of being deported or detained to even attempt to clarify their status. The Home Office does not even know the number of people it has wrongly deported, but even one person deported in error is one too many. So I ask the Minister to say in responding to this debate how many British citizens from the Windrush generation have been detained, and how many have been deported.

Whatever the answer, we know that a gross injustice has been committed against the Windrush generation, and those responsible for it must be held to account. The Windrush generation are owed more than that, however; they are owed the full restoration of their rights and compensation for the wrongs committed against them. But they are also owed a national discussion of how their country came to treat them with such inhumanity—a discussion of the history that led to the present day.

It is a history that my family knows well. My grandparents came to Britain in the 1960s. They were part of the Windrush generation, and their history and the history of the British empire are inextricably tied together. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) so proudly said, it is a history

[*Marsha De Cordova*]

that begins in the 17th century when the European empires enslaved millions of Africans, taking them to the Caribbean in brutal conditions, subjecting them to cruelty and murderous exploitation and building the wealth of the British ruling elite on their enslaved labour. In the eyes of the British colonial rulers, they were unworthy of having rights. That is the Caribbean history just as it is the British history.

When my grandparents left Jamaica for Britain, they knew that history. When they arrived here, they were truly welcomed by some, but not all. They were confronted by fascists and racists, and they faced Conservative election posters that said “If you want a coloured for your neighbour, vote Labour”, signs in shop windows reading “No blacks, no dogs, no Irish”, and politicians such as Enoch Powell who whipped up racial hatred, blaming migrants for economic and social problems. Still my grandparents persevered. They built their lives here and raised their family here. By right, they are British citizens, but in the eyes of some, the colour of their skin says otherwise. By right, they are citizens, but they are not seen as such.

As a society, we must reflect on how we have allowed the British state to detain and deport wholly innocent British citizens and allowed our Government to pursue a “deport first, appeal later” policy. We must reflect, we must learn and, first and foremost, we must ensure that the Government give justice to the Windrush generation. Justice means compensation for the harms committed, the details of which the Government must fully spell out—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order.

5.10 pm

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): What has happened to the Windrush generation is completely unacceptable, and the Government must do all they can to sort out this mess as quickly as possible. I would like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), who worked tirelessly during her time as Home Secretary and saw our country through times of unprecedented difficulty, including three major terrorist attacks. I also thank her for her response to the Windrush issue, during which time she acted without hesitation to put processes in place to correct past mistakes.

As the Government continue to right this wrong, I would like to seek assurances from the new Home Secretary on a few counts. First, we cannot underestimate the administrative difficulties faced by many in the Windrush generation, and indeed people from other Commonwealth countries who came here prior to 1971, in proving their citizenship to the Home Office. Many simply will not have official documentation. I understand that the Government are accepting other forms of evidence, such as school records, but Ministers must not take their eye off the ball. We need the various arms of the Government—from the Home Office to the Department for Work and Pensions and from the Department for Education to Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs—to work together to help those people to build a picture of their life here in the United Kingdom. This is complicated work, and the new unit at the Home Office must stand ready to assist people through the process.

The Government have already taken positive steps, with a new dedicated team helping individuals to identify and gather evidence to confirm their existing right to be in the UK. They have ensured that no one affected will be charged for the documentation that proves their right to be here. They have also created a new website to provide the necessary additional information, so that as many people as possible feel that they can come forward. The Prime Minister and the Home Office have met and reassured leaders, charities, community groups and high commissioners from across the Commonwealth. They have outlined the actions that we are taking to help people to evidence their right to be here.

The issue of compensation has already been mentioned many times today. The Windrush generation have given us decades of service and hard work, and helped us to rebuild our communities—communities of which they are now an integral part. Any compensation scheme must have those affected at its heart, but there is no doubt that we have failed them. This was a failure of the British state and we must make it right. That means compensation for all those who were blocked from accessing vital services, who were threatened with deportation or whose lives have in any way been adversely affected by this failure. Only then can we show the Windrush generation that we are sorry, that they are valued, and that we are determined to look after them as the British citizens they are.

This sorry episode was a failure of process and of the system under successive Governments. We have heard a lot today about the impact of the hostile—or compliant, to use another word—environment. We have been told that it is putting off foreign doctors and nurses from coming to the UK. We have heard how the Government’s migration targets must be dropped. However, I would remind the Opposition that the compliant environment has nothing to do with this. It is about tackling illegal immigration. I believe that that is an important job of Government, and that it is what the public want us to do.

As a member of the Home Affairs Committee, I will work with Members across the parties to ensure that we examine what has gone wrong, that we scrutinise why it has happened, and that we work to find a way forward. We will make recommendations to the Government, and I look forward to working with Committee members on that. What has happened to the Windrush generation has been scandalous. It was a failure of the system, Madam Deputy Speaker, and those people are just as British as you or me.

5.14 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), who is no longer in his place, on bringing this matter to the Government’s attention and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on her dogged determination in pursuing the issue.

I want to take issue with some of the comments made in this debate. The hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), who is no longer in his place, spoke about the matter as though it were just a small administrative error, but my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) summed up the ignominy that many of my constituents have faced because they

have a west African name or a strong accent. They come to see me for things that they should not have to see me about—not just immigration issues but, yes, those as well. I, too, have a heavy immigration workload, and I have some advice for the Minister, because another thing that has been said in this debate is, “Why aren’t we looking at the Labour years?” Well, I was the Immigration Minister in the last three years of the Labour Government, so perhaps I can help to bridge that gap.

Let me be candid: the Home Office has long had administrative problems on immigration. One of the issues that the Minister and her boss the new Home Secretary will face is that, to deal with the problem, we need proper investment in the right quality and numbers of people to be able to turn casework around in the necessary time, so that people are not dribbling through the system for a decade or bouncing backwards and forwards with decisions that require legal challenge. However, even with the current desire to tackle the issue, I bet that it will be a big challenge to secure the necessary money from the Treasury to deliver that.

Lyn Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend. I also have massive amounts of immigration casework, and I really have not benefited from the staff with whom I have been beginning to get a relationship, and who really understand the cases, being changed willy-nilly by the Home Office. We could do with some stability.

Meg Hillier: Tackling that is a huge challenge for the Department, and I agree with my hon. Friend. This was not just an administrative error. Dealing with the administration of immigration with never enough resources has been a challenge for the Home Office for years.

The hostile environment has bitten hard in my constituency. Discretionary leave to remain was reduced from five years to three years, meaning that people had to apply twice before they could get citizenship, and is now reduced to two years, meaning that people have to apply three times. The fee is £800 a time—it keeps going up; I lose track—before they pay over £1,000 for British citizenship. The costs are bankrupting my constituents who are working hard in this country, paying their taxes and paying their dues. They are being treated like second-class citizens. They are not yet citizens, but they aspire to be and they are doing everything right.

Turning to the people who are citizens, the Government have in effect declared an amnesty for those people from the Commonwealth who arrived here between 1973 and 1988, and I have another word of advice for the Minister. In declaring an amnesty—officials will be quavering at my use of that word, because they hate it in the Home Office—will she be clear, as other hon. Members have asked, about whether it applies to all members of the Commonwealth? Will it cover my west African constituents who are in exactly the same position? If I only I had the time, I would tell her about some of the horrific cases. One man is homeless, and another is about to lose his home because it belongs to his partner. They are frightened about ringing the Home Office helpline in case it causes them problems.

Those people are from the Caribbean, but I also have Commonwealth citizens who are in the same position. They are originally from Africa, but they are British, and yet they do not have the paperwork to prove it. The little paper Immigration and Nationality Directorate

letters that people come to our surgeries clutching have been enough to get them a job and their entitlements, but their employers have suddenly said, “But you need a biometric residence permit.” Why did the Home Office—this happened strictly under this Government when they changed the rules—not write to everybody on the immigration lists and say, “You now need this new document in order to hold your job and keep your rights”? Had it done so, those people who are not yet citizens—those who have not chosen to go down the citizenship route, but have indefinite leave to remain—would have been in a better position.

The issue goes wider than just the Windrush generation, and let us hope that there is not just a quick fix for them, but a much wider review of the system. Let us not forget that this Government chose to abolish identity cards, which were being rolled out on my watch in the Home Office. They would have made a big difference to many of my constituents who very much wanted to prove that they had the same rights as other citizens.

I have little time to cover compensation and legal aid, but good-quality legal advice saves time and money for everybody in the long run, and justice is denied if justice cannot be accessed because someone cannot afford it. I am afraid to say that we have a real dearth of good-quality legal advice with legal aid—it is a desert in some areas—and many lawyers are charging high fees for, frankly, poor service. The Minister needs to take that into account, or we will see further such problems along the way.

5.19 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), and it is very reasonable of her to speak so candidly about the previous Labour Government and her experience as a Minister. There are some challenges that any Government would face, no matter what commitments they make, because of the scale of the task and the logistics involved, and so on.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who speaks for the SNP, accused Conservative MPs of blaming migrants for the problems in our society and in our infrastructure. She attended a Westminster Hall debate in November 2017, called by my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), on immigration and the economy, in which I praised the east Europeans who recently came to this country and who have made such a contribution. The recycling plant in Suffolk serves the whole country, and it is kept going by Romanians—I praise them, and I will always praise them.

Today, on the Windrush issue, I am happy to offer the same praise to those who have come here from the Commonwealth. Although I now happily live in Suffolk, I was originally brought up in north London. I went to a primary school in Edgware that had many Commonwealth pupils, many of whom I assume came from families who were part of the Windrush generation.

Today we see the contribution, particularly from the Afro-Caribbean community, on the Front Benches, on the Back Benches, in this country’s public life—particularly in this country’s sporting life—and in the small businesses they run. My mother was a nurse for many years in north London. Nearly all her colleagues were of Afro-Caribbean origin and, of course, they made a huge contribution to the NHS.

[James Cartlidge]

Here is the thing, as terrible as the stories are—I do not defend any of it, and the Government certainly need to sort out the problems that have arisen—the underlying cause, about which the hon. and learned Lady and others asked, is the sheer scale of immigration, both legal and illegal, that this country has experienced in recent years. It is not a conspiracy. The scale is unprecedented, and I quote David Wood, the former director general of immigration enforcement, who told the Home Affairs Committee on 10 October 2017 that he estimated there to be at least 1 million people illegally resident in the UK—that is equivalent to the populations of Edinburgh and Glasgow added together. A responsible Government cannot ignore such things. It is an abuse of the system because it is an abuse of the rule of law. Frankly, it is an abuse of the legitimate citizenship held by all those who have been spoken of today.

I very much regret what has happened, but a number of hon. Members have spoken about language and the rise of scapegoat culture. Well, let us be absolutely clear that, for the centre to hold and to govern in politics, we have to address those issues, even if they are unpalatable. If we do not, we will truly give rise to populists, UKIP will get back into the game and the fringes of politics will come back.

People have to see that we are dealing with the problems that matter to them, and our constituents want us to address illegal immigration. We have to find a way that does not involve this sort of outcome, in which people who are here legitimately are penalised. We all accept that, so it is about striking a balance, but let us be clear that part of the balance is a robust immigration policy that deals with people who are here illegally and, if need be, deports them.

I intervened on the shadow Home Secretary, and I am pleased that she is happy to confirm that she accepts the need to tackle illegal immigration. There is perhaps more consensus than we let on. We need to work together to build an immigration system that is firm but fair, as many Governments have pledged over the years. It is not easy, but we need to respond to legitimate public concern that the level of immigration, and particularly illegal immigration, must be sustainable, otherwise we will lose the public's support and they will turn to parties that are not so palatable.

5.23 pm

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): In the past few weeks I have been encouraged by the level of public backlash on the Windrush scandal, which is a mark of how far we have come and of how we are generally a more diverse, tolerant and accepting society. As ever, we have much more to do, and I am sure the new Home Secretary does not underestimate the Government's role and the importance of the tone set by his Department in how it treats people who come from other places to live in this country, and in ensuring that we continue to make our society more tolerant and more accepting.

That is why I have been bitterly disappointed by the tone and comments of some Conservative Members, particularly during the early part of this debate. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and

Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said, people from across the Commonwealth are watching this debate, and we owe it to them that the debate is conducted in the right way.

The public backlash also highlights just how out of touch the Home Office has been under the stewardship of the Home Secretary's two immediate predecessors. I have not had any cases directly from the Windrush generation, but as a new Member of Parliament I can say that the Home Office has been the most difficult Department I have had to deal with. As a Scottish MP, I can say that many of the day-to-day issues that other Members will see in their casework are devolved to Scotland and are dealt with by MSPs. Immigration cases take up a large share of the matters my constituents bring to me, and just when I think I have heard it all, there is sure to be another example of an individual or a family in crisis because of the appalling treatment at the hands of the Home Office.

These are remarkable cases but it is clear to anyone who would take the time to listen to the people involved that they have every right to be in this country. I know the new Home Secretary does not like using the words "hostile environment", but, whether he likes to call it that or not, that is what we have. The right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who is no longer in her place, put it well when she described the default position as being the assumption that the person is here illegally. The numbers game is not working. My constituents are not numbers. They are sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, and hard-working families, some of whom are devastated at the prospect of being separated. They are people who want to put roots down and start families. In one case, a young couple were unable to undergo the fertility treatment they need because the Home Office is indifferent to their special circumstances.

My constituents who have settled in this country tell me that they are Scottish and they want to stay in Scotland. They love Scotland, and they want to contribute and play a full role in their community. These are people who have paid thousands of pounds, whether they can afford it or not, for the right to stay in this country, yet at every turn the Home Office has put obstacles in their way and treated them like they do not belong. We should be delighted that skilled people who want to come to the UK, to contribute to our economy and pay taxes, and to enrich our lives with their culture love this country so much that they are prepared to keep battling against the Home Office at every turn. But they should not have to battle. The Home Secretary must resolve the Windrush scandal, but if we are to prevent this from happening again, the hostile environment must end, and now is the time to do it.

5.27 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate. It was particularly welcome to hear the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) a few moments ago and his comments about the contribution that migrants are making to his community. In the same way, those who have come to make Torbay their home, to make their life there and to exercise their legal rights within the community have made my community a stronger and better place.

When I first saw the heading for this debate and saw that this was what the Opposition had selected, I thought we might see a motion that celebrated the contribution the Windrush generation had made and referred to the achievements of that generation, who are as British as any of the rest of us in this Chamber and have made this country stronger through their presence. Unfortunately, that is not what the motion does. It is focused on getting certain documents and paperwork. It is an interesting one to read, with the selection of the dates being the most interesting part. It contains yesterday's date, stating "up to and including 1 May 2018".

It makes sense to specify yesterday—I can see the logic there—but why the selection of 11 May 2010 as the start of the period? What happened on that day that makes it such a significant date? The Opposition chose not 1 May 2010 or 1 May 2009, but 11 May 2010. That will not be because it was the date of the last flight of a particular type of Nimrod; it will be because it was the date that the coalition Government came into power, which perhaps reveals some of what this motion is actually about.

This motion could have been an opportunity to have pushed the Government for particular dates by which certain cases will be resolved. It could have specified compensation payments, but it does not do so. It is about getting emails and texts about policy discussions—I am surprised it did not list WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and anything else. I accept that government has to have a space behind the scenes, as any former Minister in this Chamber and anyone who has run their own local council will know, in which the discussion of policy can take place. Clearly, if there are differences of opinion, assessment papers might be presented later to back up policy coming through this Parliament, but that space is there. That says to me that the motion is the product of something rather different from a motivation to celebrate the fantastic contribution that the Windrush generation have made to this nation.

It was right for the Government to apologise for the handling of many cases. In my constituency, we have had only one email relating to Windrush, although it probably is not directly related, but it is right that the Government have apologised, as evidenced by some of the cases that the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) described.

It is probably worth saying that we should celebrate the fact—it is quite significant, thinking of the contribution that that generation has made to this country—that two members of an ethnic minority in this country, the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary, were the leading spokesmen for the Government and the Opposition. Despite obvious disagreements between the two, it is a significant moment for our country that that has been seen here today, particularly when we are discussing this particular issue.

It has been a welcome debate. As the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) said, it would be welcome to have clarity about whether the issue applies to the whole Commonwealth, because we should remember that the Commonwealth includes not only Caribbean countries, but many countries in Africa and in the Pacific, and other nations.

I welcome the opportunity to have been able to speak for a few moments and pay tribute to a generation that is British, that has done a huge amount for this country

and that has not been treated well. It was right that there was an apology. The wording of the motion, however, reveals motivations other than the celebration of that legacy.

5.30 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I start by thanking the Minister for Immigration for listening to my recent plea for the Merry family, whose mother, Volha, received a letter from the Home Office to deport her and take her away from her family home in Coatbridge, where she lives with her husband Derek and daughter Milana. The Minister admitted that the letter, sent in error, should not have been sent, and apologised to me for the mistake. Madam Deputy Speaker, can you imagine if you were sent a letter, to take you away—away from your family, your children, your neighbours, your home? Imagine how many people would run for cover if they received a letter similar to the one that dropped through Mrs Merry's letterbox. The Minister's admission came after weeks of chaos from the Home Office, amid the scandals of the Windrush generation and immigration targets.

The question remains: how many more letters were sent in error? How many people are in hiding, in fear of this Government coming to break down their door to take them away? Is it any wonder that we have people unregistered living in the UK, living in fear, living in pain because they cannot go to hospital, living in someone's house that they cannot call home—mothers and fathers, frightened to speak out for fear of losing their children?

I was glad that Mr and Mrs Merry came to see me; I was their last hope. They were ready to run. I could see the fear in their eyes; that young couple had tried everything to register themselves so that they could live in peace, without worry, to bring up their daughter Milana, who was born in the UK, just as her father was. I saw a family who were desperate, who wanted help, and I was determined to keep that family together, to help them stay close to their friends in Coatbridge.

I came to this place to speak out for people—to speak out for my constituents—but I will not be the judge. The judge will be little Milana, who will see the tears that her mother shed every day turn to a smile when she has the chance to hold her daughter, instead of being held in a detention centre, ready to be deported, because of this Government.

5.33 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It has been a huge honour to sit in the Chamber and listen to so many powerful speeches. I start by thanking the members of the Windrush generation, because time and again we have heard stories about how so many of those individuals have each helped to build the Britain that we know and love today. Like many others in this place, I regularly have constituents who come to me, asking for help with their Home Office cases. The Windrush citizens are British citizens and must be treated as such. As the new Home Secretary said as recently as Monday, this could have been his own family, and he and his team are right to be absolutely focused on getting help to those who need it now.

[Vicky Ford]

I am enormously proud to live in a country where people from all over the world want to come and live. I am enormously proud to be in a country where people can come from another place and sit in this House as a Member of Parliament. People can watch their own children sit on the Front Benches in this Parliament and rise now to become Home Secretary.

This is a fantastic country, and the rest of the world is watching how we act now and how we manage this situation. How we help the Windrush people will have huge precedence for how we then help the 3 million EU citizens who also have the right to be here, and how we expect other European countries to help the 1 million British citizens living with their families in Europe. We must get this right.

If the motion said the Windrush generation are British and have the right to be here, I would vote for it. If it said that many members of the Windrush generation have been treated abysmally, I would vote for it. If it said that the Windrush generation should be apologised to and compensated, I would vote for it. If it said that we must learn from this and make sure it never happens again, I would certainly vote for it. If it said that the Home Office should urgently put in extra staff to help sort out the problems, I would vote for it.

But that is not what this motion says. This motion says we should take staff off the frontline—staff who could be helping to sort out those problems—and send them into the archives, send them to seize computers and trawl through emails, and send them to grab people's mobile phones to find out what their text messages say. As the Home Secretary said, that could take 100 people off the frontline—people who should be helping our citizens. That is why I will not vote for the motion tonight.

5.37 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I have been a Member of the House for 26 years and I want to begin by talking about my experience with a Conservative Government when I was first elected.

In those days, Ministers were willing to meet Members personally when they had a case of somebody in difficulty. I remember a young woman who had won a newspaper competition for a free holiday in Morocco with her husband, but who had the misfortune to have been born in the northern part of Cyprus before Cyprus had its independence. There were all kinds of difficulty and she could not get a post office to issue her a British passport. I got Charles Wardle to overturn the decision of his officials. They gave her travel documents, but he said to me, "Please, please don't make this public until after I have ceased to be a Minister."

I remember the Secretary of State for International Trade, when he was a Foreign Office Minister, overruling officials: he was a doctor and he understood the compassionate case that I made for somebody to come here as a visitor and be able to care for someone. I remember Ministers in that time, and I say this because I am trying to get this Government to understand—there has been a change in culture.

In July 2013, the go-home vans were sent into my constituency. That sent fear into many, many people. There has been the development of a culture of disbelief

within the Home Office. That has happened over many years. Between 2001 and 2002, I was in the Home Office as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister dealing with immigration and nationality, Lord Rooker. I can say there was enormous pressure at that time because of the political climate that we had had develop in this country.

I see the current crisis as an opportunity. If the documentation is properly made available to the Home Affairs Committee, which will then decide what is appropriate to be published and what is not—I am sure that the Committee can be trusted to do that, given the integrity of my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper)—there will be a chance for us to put some things right. I am not just talking about the Windrush issue. There are other problems, including the English language test scandal exposed by the *Financial Times*, which I mentioned in my intervention on the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). There is a similar issue with the tier 2 high-value migrant visas.

There are people in this country today, in different categories, who came here perfectly legitimately, but who have now found that their status is being challenged and they are being told that they have to leave. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) said, the coalition Government scrapped the plans for ID cards that were in the pipeline from the Labour Government. If that had not happened, the situation would not be perfect but we would be in a much better position today to deal with this culture of disbelief.

5.41 pm

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes).

I echo the words of the Home Secretary in expressing my profound thanks and admiration to those of the Windrush generation, who—almost 70 years ago to the day—came to this country to help to rebuild post-war Britain and to work in our public services. It is right that we recognise, reflect on and address what has happened to them, particularly in view of the fact that their journey here was one of hope. Their journey and subsequent integration into British life reflected their determination and aspirations to build a wonderful life here. It was also a testament to the open and outward-looking nature of our country. It is important that we go forward from here in that vein, recognising the value of the Commonwealth of Nations and the contribution that its citizens have made, and will continue to make, to this country and to the world.

The Windrush generation have built their life here and have contributed enormously to our country. I emphasise again that there should be no doubt about their right to remain here. Where harm has been done, it should be recognised, addressed and compensated. Members of the Windrush generation came from all over the Commonwealth.

I declare an interest in Commonwealth issues, as a number of my family members have emigrated to Commonwealth countries across the globe. My daughter Felicity emigrated to Australia and has settled down there with her family. My brother Patrick and his wife Sally lived in New Zealand for a number of years,

after emigrating there more than 40 years ago. I am certain that Members from right across the House have relations living in all areas of the Commonwealth.

Last month, the UK was host to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting—the biennial assembly of Heads of State from all 53 members of the Commonwealth. It has been argued over the years, particularly since our accession to the European Community in 1973, that the Commonwealth is an irrelevance on the national stage and with regards to our foreign policy. I believe that the opposite is true. As we begin to leave the European Union, our relationship with our Commonwealth cousins will become ever more important, and we must strengthen and build on our historical ties and friendships.

As we debate and address the appalling treatment of some of the Windrush generation, I hope that we can go forward positively. In considering how our country has welcomed and benefited from migration to this country from Commonwealth countries, we should also recognise and thank the wonderful spirit with which other Commonwealth countries have welcomed our citizens to settle and add value to their societies. We should do all we can to build on those mutually beneficial relationships. As we settle and move on from the Windrush scandal, it is important that we again look outwards, rebuild the bonds we have with our Commonwealth and make this work for us and them in a positive way.

5.44 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I would like to add my support to the contributions made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and many other Labour Members, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), who rightly said that the treatment of the Windrush generation has been shameful. I want to return to the central point of this issue, rather than discussing the nature of the motion, as some Conservative Members have tried to do.

It is now more than two weeks since my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham raised an urgent question in order to bring this serious issue to the attention of the House, and there has rightly been a lot of discussion and debate. Yet we stand here today still with a lack of clarity on how it will be resolved for all those affected, who, let us not forget, are British citizens. Serious questions remain about compensation, the burden of proof that we place on individuals, and what long-term protection there will be to ensure that the Windrush generation—and indeed others like them from other Commonwealth countries or the European Union—have their rights protected. This uncertainty adds to the anxiety and suffering of those affected.

The mistreatment of the Windrush generation is the key issue that many people in my constituency have been raising over the past two weeks prior to the local elections. People are very upset. There is very strong feeling across different communities, and across the whole of the town of Reading, about the wrong that has been done to people from this community. People are understandably upset that our friends and neighbours have been put in this position and have suffered wrong. The factor that has caused the most

upset among my constituents is that these problems have been caused not by mistakes by officials implementing the rules but by the fact that this Government have promoted a hostile environment for migrants. The Government have introduced immigration policies that have created an environment that has placed a deeply unfair burden of proof on people who are here legally, have the right to be here, and yet feel that they are being asked to prove beyond reasonable doubt that they should be here.

The stories we have heard from people across the country of being detained, being denied access to NHS treatment, losing their homes, or suffering every other form of terrible pressure and abuse have sent shockwaves across every community in this country, including in my own constituency. I would like to put it on record that Reading has the largest Barbadian population outside the Caribbean island of Barbados itself, and is a focal point for people from that island who come to live in the UK. We have a very strong West Indian community in our town. I pay tribute to BAFA—the Barbados and Friends Association—and to community groups that represent other West Indian and Commonwealth communities across Reading. Reading is twinned with Speightstown in Barbados, and we have had visits from both the Prime Minister of Barbados and its high commissioner.

I therefore support today's motion calling for all papers and all communications to be provided for the scrutiny of the Home Affairs Committee. With regard to next steps, assurances that there are no statutory or legal obstacles are not enough. The rights of Commonwealth citizens must be enshrined in law, so I would urge the Government to commit to restoring—

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matt Rodda: I wish to make some more progress given the pressure of time.

I urge the Government to commit to restoring the protections for Commonwealth citizens that existed prior to the Immigration Act 2014. I also urge the Government to confirm that those affected will be fully compensated for loss of income or benefits, legal fees, Home Office application fees, air fares, emotional distress, and any other costs that they may have incurred as a result of the mistaken hostile environment policy. The new Home Secretary has said that he does not like the word “hostile”. I think he will be judged on his deeds, not his words.

5.48 pm

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): I am very pleased to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda).

It has been very obvious today and in previous debates that there is justifiable anger over this issue. I think it is partly motivated by the fact that the contribution of the Windrush generation to building our society and economy in the post-war years has not been sufficiently recognised, or is undermined by what has happened. One element that we would do well to celebrate and recognise is the contribution of many members of the Windrush generation to our armed forces, prior to their

[*Leo Docherty*]

arrival in this country in 1948, during the second world war. During the second world war, some 10,000 Caribbean soldiers served in the British armed forces across all three services, and many conducted themselves in a very distinguished manner.

That includes one Billy Strachan, who arrived in England from Jamaica in 1940 to serve in the Royal Air Force. He conducted himself with distinction, completing 30 missions as a part of Bomber Command at a time when the casualty rate in it was some 50%. He was made an officer and completed his training at Cranwell. The historian Ashley Jackson, in his book “The British Empire”, quotes Billy Strachan, who describes arriving from Jamaica as a new young pilot officer in his RAF unit and his surprise on meeting the batman he had been allocated:

“I was a little...boy from the Caribbean and instinctively I called him ‘Sir’. ‘No, Sir’, he hastily corrected, ‘It is I who call you ‘Sir’...”

That is a very interesting vignette, and it reflects the remarkable role that serving in the armed forces can often have in advancing human rights.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I only wish I had known my hon. Friend was going to make that point, or I would have looked up the name of the very distinguished Afro-Caribbean officer from world war two who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and was one of many people from that background who were recognised for great gallantry in the fight against fascism and Nazism.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend’s intervention, and I hope that, prior to the conclusion of my speech, another Member will intervene to give us that name.

Of course, it was not such a positive experience for every member of the Caribbean community who served in the British Army. Allan Wilmot, who also came from Jamaica, volunteered to join the Royal Navy in 1941 and served throughout the second world war. He described the sense of hostility that many felt on arriving in the British Isles after the war:

“Being British, you feel like you are coming home, but when we came here it was like we dropped out of the sky. Nobody knew anything about us.”

Those people had to display the same bravery that they had demonstrated during the war on arrival in this country, to overcome that hostility, and of course many of them overcame it successfully and went on to contribute very meaningfully to our economy and our society.

The distinguished service of Caribbean armed forces men and women is not confined to the history books. There is no finer example of gallantry in the modern era than Johnson Beharry, from Grenada, who served with the Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment in Iraq and was awarded the Victoria Cross in 2005 for his remarkable bravery in Amarah. Anyone who has served recently in the armed forces will have very positive experiences of serving shoulder to shoulder with members of the Commonwealth and Caribbean soldiers. I was very pleased to serve alongside Guardsmen from St Lucia and Jamaica.

My interest in the experience of soldiers from abroad who have come to this country and then go on to settle here also links to the experience of our Gurkha soldiers. They, like the Windrush generation, navigated the transition from service life to civilian life. Just as we are hugely proud of the distinguished conduct and contribution that the Gurkhas make, we would do very well today to be similarly proud of the distinguished service of a generation of Caribbean soldiers and the positive contribution they made in the second world war to guarding and defending our freedom.

5.53 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the very interesting speech by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty).

Among the many issues that have been raised today is that of the need to prove Britishness in this hostile environment. When Bevan set up the NHS, he said about distinguishing “visitors”:

“Are British citizens to carry means of identification everywhere to prove that they are not visitors? For if the sheep are to be separated from the goats both must be classified. What began as an attempt to keep the Health Service for ourselves would end by being a nuisance to everybody.”

It may be time to revisit that issue. Little did he know that some 70 years later, the people who were so crucial in building his NHS would be facing such struggles.

The debate about migration and proof of identity is not new, but what I hope is new is the voice and experience of many of us here today in this place. I grew up the daughter of Irish migrants who in the 1950s—aged just 17 and 21—came to a really exciting but alien and sometimes hostile environment. My contemporaries in west London, as well as the Irish, largely came from the Indian subcontinent but also from the Caribbean. We knew we were different, with our parents born of a different time and place—we were like the in-betweeners—but we shared our knowledge of our history, food, customs and religion. I learned about Amritsar, Indian partition, slavery, the Commonwealth, the world’s religions and customs, and the joy of those cultures not from history books, but from my peers.

This country is great because of the ebb and flow of people, their industry and their ideas and culture over centuries. What has opened up in the past few years is the hostility that we know our parents endured, but which we hoped had gone. Many colleagues, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), have reminded us all so eloquently of the debt that we now owe to those previous generations.

I have been contacted by some Windrush people, but the Home Office problems go much further. In my constituency I have an American husband in his early 30s who is married to a British citizen, but they have been unnecessarily split due to administrative errors. A man born and bred in Bristol South, who moved to Australia to find work, cannot now bring back his wife and child. Someone who has been a civil servant in Bristol for many years and his second wife, with a 15-year-old son, were refused a visa and did not receive any appeals letter.

The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and Liberty have called for the appointment of an independent commission to review the workings of the Home Office and the legal framework of the hostile environment,

and I support that call. They have identified many issues, including that of culture and the fact that the Home Office is continually error-prone and often arbitrary in its decision making.

I want to make a further comment about the Home Office in relation to Brexit and concerns in Northern Ireland, which I recently raised with the Minister. The Home Office Border Force recently issued job adverts requiring a UK passport issued in Northern Ireland. Following pressure on the Home Office, including from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the adverts have been withdrawn and an apology has been made. However, given the delicate balance agreed as part of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement—that people in Northern Ireland can be British, Irish or both—this was a fundamental display of at best ignorance within the Department.

The problems within the Home Office go far—much wider than Windrush and what we are talking about today. The Government need to get a grip and, crucially, they need to change the culture from the very top.

5.57 pm

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): It is a privilege to take part in this important debate, and to follow my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), who rightly reminded the House of the proud record of service and loyalty of people from the Commonwealth.

Let me start by taking a step back. In my constituency, I am proud to have a large number of people who came to this country from Uganda in the 1970s. They were given 90 days to leave by Idi Amin, and they came here with nothing but the shirts on their backs, but they have brought such a lot to my constituency, building fantastic businesses through their hard work and enterprise. They are just one community in which I see so much to admire in people who have come to this country. As I go around my constituency, I see a fantastic culture of effort and hard work in our schools, and communities that have a strong record of looking after older people in their homes. There is much to admire.

When I speak to people in those migrant communities in my constituency, I am also reminded that they feel very strongly that we must not lose sight of the distinction between legal and illegal migration. They feel that they have jumped through many hoops, done all the right things and played by the rules, and they do not want people who have not done the same simply to be allowed to come to this country illegally.

I would argue for balance. I feel very strongly that the Windrush generation have been very badly treated, and it is essential that the new Home Secretary puts that right. He should put in place a more humane system, in which we do more to help such people prove their right to be here. I also think there is more we could do to make our immigration system as a whole more humane. We could be quicker in processing asylum claims and make sure we are quicker with visa applications, so that people do not fear missing family occasions. I welcome the Government's integration strategy, and I would like us to do more to ensure that everyone can take part in our society.

Even as we do all those things, we must not throw the baby out with the bathwater. I believe that we need to control migration, which does put pressure on finite

resources such as housing and our infrastructure. Even today, a new poll has shown that the great majority of people in this country want tighter control of migration, and I think it is right to bear down on illegal immigration. Most illegal immigration takes place not as a result of people sneaking across borders but because people overstay in this country. So it is right to have measures in place that make it more difficult to be an illegal immigrant and that help us to reduce illegal immigration, which is unfair immigration.

If the motion was in favour of more humane treatment of the Windrush generation, I would vote for it in a heartbeat. Sadly, its effect would be to absorb huge amounts of resource, pursuing an agenda that will not help the people I want to see helped. I would like to see a humane system in which we do everything we can to help people who may not have much in the way of resources to navigate a complex bureaucracy. I would like to see a system that was less bureaucratic, more humane and faster. However, I am unable to support the motion, because it would distract us, rather than help us, in that important task, and it would make it more difficult, rather than easier, for the new Home Secretary to get on with the important work he is doing in ensuring a fairer deal for the Windrush generation.

6 pm

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. When the Prime Minister was Home Secretary, we saw immigration taken out of the scope of legal aid, and we have seen the effects over the last few weeks, as the cruel, inhumane and unnecessary treatment of the Windrush generation and their families has been revealed—people unable to defend themselves against the weight of the Home Office and the hostile environment it has fostered.

As a new MP, one of my first cases last year was that of Mr Robinson, a resident of Jamaican descent who came to me for help. He had been living in this country since the 1970s, working and paying taxes for his whole life here and making a valuable contribution. He is proud that his son became a world champion boxer. His son was working as a storeman in Cardiff and, with just two days' notice, he accepted a fight for the world featherweight title and won.

Having never needed a passport since he lost his many decades ago, along with his naturalisation documents, Mr Robinson tried to apply for a new passport so that he could attend a wedding in Jamaica just last year. He was sent a letter saying that there was no record of him and that he needed to reapply for naturalisation and to pay the fees, which he did. Then the Home Office told him that he was not automatically entitled to citizenship. In the final letter, he was told that, because he had failed to register his British citizenship upon Jamaica's independence, he had been relinquished of his British nationality in place of a Jamaican one, without his knowledge. At 85, and having been in this country for over 63 years, Mr Robinson is one of the oldest UK residents caught up in this fiasco and one of those who has been here the longest.

Just last week, I heard from an immigration lawyer representing students in Wales who are being rejected from university because their parents are from the Windrush generation. A student who got A*s in her exams wanted

[Anna McMorris]

to be a doctor, but she could not prove she was in the United Kingdom legally, despite having been born here. When the university discovered that, her benefits were stopped and she lost her part-time job. That has meant that three generations of one family—one born here and the other two having been here for over 40 years and over 50 years—have been completely cut off from the right to housing, the right to benefits and the right to continue to be in their jobs. That is why I am calling on the Government to make legal aid available to all applicants who are now forced to prove their immigration status in the UK. They need that financial support and legal help to help them to secure confirmation of their entitlement to British citizenship.

The Government cannot undo the trauma, pain and suffering that has already been caused, but they can ensure that people can access the legal aid, support, justice and compensation that they deserve as valuable British citizens.

6.4 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate, Mr Speaker.

This debate touches the very heart of us. For so many of us, it is fundamentally about fairness. It is a debate about how people should be treated fairly. It is clear that all of us feel that a gross unfairness has been done to people who have been here legally, are part of us and are very much part of the fabric of our community. It is an unfairness that, sadly, started generations ago and has persisted for far too long.

Many Members have spoken, so I will not take up much more time. I simply want to say that that unfairness applies not only, as many have said, to the Windrush generation in the purest sense, but to a wider community who have come from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the African nations, the middle east and all over the world. One community I would particularly like to highlight, because it is one that touches me personally, is the Jewish community, who have come over the years and have also suffered unfairness through immigration at various points. I realise that that is in many ways tangential to today's debate, but the point about fairness in migration is that it must include everyone or it includes no one.

I celebrate the fact that we have a son of the Windrush generation representing Her Majesty's Government—is that not an image of the British dream if ever there was one?—and that he is not referred to as a British-Pakistani. He is not referred to as a British-anything. There is no qualifier. Nobody here is referred to as a British-anything. We are all simply British. That is a huge enrichment for our national life. It has made us, as a country, so much stronger.

I will end by saying how proud I am that this House is represented by so many different communities and by so many people who have come here very recently or many generations ago. The fairness we speak of today—this aspiration of equality that we all seek and too often fail to achieve—is at the heart of Britishness. It is therefore at the heart of the duty of the Home Office to deliver it. I know the new Secretary of State will do just that.

6.6 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The Windrush generation are remarkable for their resilience and their grace. Before the Windrush sailed from the Caribbean, many of its passengers had volunteered to serve in the UK armed forces during the second world war, making that extraordinary sacrifice despite the racism they experienced, and choosing to rise above it and to serve the cause of fighting fascism in Europe. The Windrush passengers were also answering a call for help from the British Government to come and rebuild Britain after the devastation of the second world war. They came, above all else, to contribute.

I am proud to represent Coldharbour Lane in Brixton, the location of the labour exchange where, in 1948, many of the passengers of the Empire Windrush came to look for work. They found it in our NHS, at London Transport and in other public services. They found it in factories, the construction industry and offices. Many made their home in Brixton, establishing the first large Caribbean community in London. Nothing about that journey was easy, from the separation from family and friends and the long sea crossing to the arrival in a cold and unfamiliar climate and the daily experience of racism epitomised in the signs on doors reading, “no blacks, no dogs, no Irish”. But the Windrush generation found a way.

The Brixton we know today was made by Windrush citizens, from the shops and the markets to the music, the community centres and the churches. Windrush citizens made Brixton not only a place with a strong Caribbean community, but a place of tolerance where diversity is celebrated and where everyone is welcome whatever their background. I moved to Brixton in 1996, and for a young person from a small town in the north of England it felt like the centre of the world. Brixton embraced me and allowed me to call it home. I am proud now to have the privilege of representing our fabulous Windrush community.

That same community, however, has encountered an immigration system under this Government that has no grace and is devoid of all compassion. It is a system that is programmed to assume the worst of everyone—to ascribe bad motives to even the most innocent of errors and to look for every possible reason why anyone who has come to the UK from overseas should not be allowed to stay. It is a system that is loaded to saying no until it is forced to do otherwise, delivering injustice in many forms.

First, there is the injustice of incompetence: the hundreds and hundreds of people I see whose applications are delayed, whose papers have been lost, or whose decisions are founded on a mistake made by the Home Office itself. Secondly, there is the enormous injustice of a system that has proactively and deliberately used the lack of formal papers held by many British citizens who have been here for decades as an excuse to try to remove them from their home or deny them access to public funds.

The third injustice affects families seeking to travel to visit one another for a range of different reasons. I have lost count of the number of heartbreaking cases in which family members seeking to travel to a wedding, a funeral, to help out around the birth of a new baby or to support a loved one who is sick have been prevented from doing so, because the Home Office makes an

assumption that anyone wanting to enter the UK must be trying to do so with the motive of staying here permanently. The most outrageous case concerned my constituent, Isaac, whose leukaemia stem cell transplant from his brother in Nigeria was delayed because the Home Office said that he might want to outstay his visa.

The final injustice I want to mention is that of having no recourse to public funds, which, right here, right now in this city, is causing a family with children and a heavily pregnant mother to sleep on our streets while two councils argue over who has a duty to look after them and put a roof over their heads.

A Department that is dealing with so many people in such appalling ways cannot command any confidence in its ability to deal fairly with the hundreds of thousands of EU nationals who will call the UK home post Brexit. We cannot allow this injustice to continue, and we cannot allow it to happen again. Nothing short of a root-and-branch review of the Home Office, a full compensation scheme for Windrush citizens and a radical change of approach will be adequate as a response to this scandal.

6.11 pm

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who made her case so passionately, and I would like to associate myself with many of her comments. We have heard that there is complete understanding from Members on both sides of the Chamber today that a wrong needs to be corrected.

Before I go on to the rest of my speech, I would like to add a brief moment of levity. There was some temporary excitement among my friends yesterday when they read a headline in the paper suggesting that the son of an immigrant bus driver had been elevated to the position of Home Secretary—they thought that the honour could have been bestowed on me already. However, when I explained that someone who holds that great position of state needs to be able to command a Department of 27,000 staff and a budget of £14 billion, handling millions of decisions every year, I think they completely agreed with the Prime Minister that it was probably best left in the hands of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), for the moment.

However, as I say, I am the son of an immigrant bus driver. My Irish parents came over from Ireland in the 1940s and I grew up in an Irish community in Birmingham. To go back to the comment made by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood, I heard stories of signs on bed-and-breakfast accommodation that said, “No blacks, No Irish.” I have a complete understanding and affinity for that community, with which my parents shared so much of their early life. Indeed, my father never went outside of England and Ireland. He never travelled to another country and I cannot imagine how disturbed he would have been to be faced with the prospect of having to provide documents that would allow him a passport to travel to other places around the world to join and support family members, as the hon. Lady so rightly mentioned. I completely understand the difficulties that people will have faced and we need to put it right.

We also need to understand the context in which this debate can sometimes be framed. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) mentioned

that we have approximately 1 million illegal immigrants in the UK. Clearly, this is a sizeable problem. Today, I read an article in the paper that said my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) had been talking about the fact that we need to reconsider our approach to our immigration policy in this country. In 1997, a poll showed that 3% of the people who were asked their view on immigration thought that it was the most important issue facing the country. Ten years later, 46% of people thought that it was the most important issue, so for today, we have a problem. However, it is best placed in the hands of a man who is a brilliant Minister, who will completely sympathise with the people affected.

What have the Government done so far? We have made 7,000 calls, identifying prospectively 3,000 people who have been affected; 600 appointments have been made and 100 people have already had their documents processed. As a party, we are taking this problem very seriously. We have deployed the resources necessary to address it, and I firmly believe that within months the Conservative party will have dealt with this issue.

6.14 pm

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this very important debate, but I am saddened that the debate is necessary. The Government assert that it is unhelpful to refer to their policies and the scrapping of protections afforded in the 2014 Act as fostering a hostile environment. I am sorry but I do not apologise. This is not, and cannot be considered, a compliant environment. It is correct to call it what it is: hostile.

I find it increasingly frustrating that the Government seek to conflate the Windrush debate and debacle with illegal immigration. To combine two sets of information is to conflate, so let me be clear: we are talking about people who were here legally being considered illegal. It is too late for warm words and simple apologies. The architects of this crisis must now step forward to give an immediate, full and honest account of how this inexcusable situation has happened and answer questions on the compensation and legal protections for the Windrush generation.

Simon Hoare: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to talk about the need for honesty in this debate. She will be aware that one of her activists in Peterborough has called my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary a “coconut” on Twitter. What is she and her party locally doing about that? Such abuse cannot be tolerated.

Fiona Onasanya: I advise the hon. Gentleman that the activist is not actually a Labour member, but I hear what he says. I disagree with any form of racism, especially racism pointed towards or coming from Members of this House, such as Conservative Members using the N word.

The Home Secretary must confirm that full compensation will be paid—compensation not limited to but including: loss of income, loss of benefits, legal fees, Home Office application fees, air fares, emotional distress and unlawful detention. Will the Home Secretary factor in such considerations as I heard when I went to a Committee room? I heard members of the Windrush generation talking about how being held in a detention centre for nine months left them unable to pay their mortgage and

[*Fiona Onasanya*]

that as result their home was repossessed? When will things of that sort be talked about and explained to us in the context of compensation?

This crisis was foreseeable and foreseen when legislation was being introduced. We have heard from both sides of the House that warnings were given to Home Secretaries but that nothing was done, no action was taken. In respect of action being taken, I also heard from a member of the Windrush generation in that Committee room that they had a biometrics card due to expire in 2024. Why would a British citizen not be given a British passport? This is not about targets; it is about justice for the Windrush generation. Until we have answers to these questions, we will continue to seek transparency.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I wish a happy 40th birthday to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), but I am afraid he does not get any longer than four minutes.

6.19 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Your good wishes, Mr Speaker, and those of other hon. Members have certainly made facing up to middle age that little bit easier today, so thank you very much indeed.

I start, as I did in Monday's debate, by paying tribute to the Windrush generation. They battled against hostility when they arrived, and it is a tragedy that they have to battle against hostility 70 years later. We have heard lots of thoughtful speeches today, but I am troubled by the emerging argument that this horrendous episode can be seen as a one-off administrative mistake. I am concerned by the argument that the world can be neatly and easily divided into good "compliant migrants" on the one hand and wicked and nasty "illegal immigrants" on the other, and by the argument that the hostile environment will affect only the latter while everyone else carries on utterly unharmed. Those arguments are at best naive and at worst disingenuous, as the Windrush scandal has shown.

The key point that I want to make in the limited time available is that the disastrous impact of the hostile environment—which is, essentially, a half-baked, back-door ID card—does not start or end with Windrush. Others have fallen victim to it, and will continue to do so. Some are legally here and some are undocumented, but they are as far from the desperate stereotype of the wicked illegal immigrant as it is possible to get. Hostility is not the answer.

Among the victims of the hostile environment—as we heard earlier from my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford)—are the tens of thousands of undocumented children in this country. Many were born here, and many of those have led most of their lives here. They are entitled to British citizenship under the British Nationality Act 1981 if they register, but few are registering. Indeed, few will be aware that they need to register until they are refused jobs, education, social security, housing or NHS treatment in exactly the same way as the Windrush victims. Then,

despite their not being allowed to work or claim benefits, the Home Office will refuse to register them unless they can scrape together more than £1,000, more than £600 of which is pure Home Office profit. Why should those children be subject to a hostile environment?

Also among those cast adrift in the hostile environment will almost certainly be tens if not hundreds of thousands of EU nationals who, for whatever reason, do not manage to secure settled status by whatever cut-off time the Home Office imposes.

There are further victims of that hostile environment. One is the Afghan interpreter who was in the news again last week. He worked with the British armed forces in Helmand province for two years, but his asylum claim has been turned down. Does he deserve to be in a hostile environment? Also forced to face that environment are the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Eritreans who were wrongly refused asylum on the basis of the Home Office's dodgy country guidance. Many of them are now street homeless and destitute.

As was pointed out earlier by the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), among the victims of the hostile environment are several thousands of students who were wrongly caught up in the English testing scandal. They were presumed guilty on the basis of a spreadsheet from the company that had messed up the testing in the first place, and were then rounded up and deported without even being allowed to see or hear the evidence against them, let alone challenge it in a tribunal in this country. Thousands of careers were ruined before they had even started. All those people might be caught up in the broad and pejorative term "illegal migrants", but they deserve a humane rather than a hostile response.

Also caught up in the hostile environment are those who—just like the Windrush generation, and just like every Member in the House—are perfectly entitled to be here. Among them will be 9 million British citizens without passports, because 43% of landlords and landladies say that they are less likely to let to such citizens now that the hostile environment has made them petrified of getting "right to rent" checks wrong. That applies particularly to those who are foreign, look foreign, or have a foreign-sounding name.

The hostile environment has brought no gain, but so much pain. We must not pretend that this starts and stops with Windrush, because otherwise it will run and run.

6.23 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I want to thank the nurses, the teachers, the bus drivers, the plumbers and the bricklayers who came to my city to make it the great city—the greatest city in the world—that it is now. I particularly thank those who came to my part of the greatest city, south London. The Windrush generation have contributed so much, not only through work but in the community, in our churches, and in our political parties. The strongest supporters of the Mitcham and Morden Labour parties, those who will be out tomorrow knocking on doors and putting leaflets through the letter boxes, will be from the Caribbean. If I had time, I would tell the House their names and their stories, but I do not. Instead, I will tell the stories of three people who have no right to be here, although each of them has lived here for more than 50 years.

Ken is 64. He came to the UK in 1962, aged eight, to join his now late parents Herman and Ivy Ellis, both of whom were UK citizens. He still has his dad's UK passport and his birth certificate. He went to school in Wandsworth. He was taken into care by Wandsworth Council for some time. He first came to see me in 2013, and I tried to help him to find evidence to support his application to stay. I am sorry to say that I did not know that he already had indefinite leave to remain. I contacted the Revenue; it would not give his details unless the Home Office asked for them. I asked Wandsworth for his school records, but was told, "We don't keep records that far back." I even requested his landing card, not knowing, of course, that that had since been destroyed. That means that since 2013, Ken, who has always worked, has been unable to do so. His relationship has broken down, he has lost his home, and he is staying at the mercy of friends.

I would like to tell the House about Neville. Neville came to Britain in 1973, aged 17, to join his parents, Thomas and Deslin, both of whom were UK citizens—and I am now holding up their British passports. A subject order request to release his file from the Home Office showed that the Home Office was entirely aware that he had come to Britain in 1973 and later informed anyone who wanted to read it that the Home Office had destroyed his file and that of his mother. So there was no way for him to prove that he indeed was a British citizen.

I first got to know Trevor on 13 April. He came to see me. He had stopped working for Blue Arrow Agency because he wanted to care for his mother, Eastlyn. When he tried to return to work, they said, "Trevor, show us your documents, show us you can work." He replied, "Can work? I have worked since the late 1970s. How can I no longer be entitled to work?" I spoke to Trevor about paying thousands of pounds to apply for indefinite leave to remain for naturalisation, because I did not understand that he already had indefinite leave to remain.

I am ashamed that I did not understand their position. I tried to help them, and I have failed. I only ask that the Home Office no longer fails and that these men be allowed to work, as their parents taught them, and to lead the lives that they want to lead as serious citizens of this country.

6.27 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): My constituent was eight when he arrived in the UK with his parents and seven siblings nearly 50 years ago. He was schooled here, got a job, married, had children and then grandchildren, worked and paid taxes. A fear of flying meant that he never applied for a passport, in contrast to all his siblings who all hold British passports. Everything changed for my constituent, whom I will call Theo, when he applied for, and was offered, a new job in November 2014. He was required to produce a passport. Not only was his job offer withdrawn, but his existing employer was forced to suspend him.

Theo began a lengthy and expensive battle with the Home Office. It wanted his parents' marriage certificate and his mother's original passport. I would challenge any Member to produce their parents' passports from 50 years ago, yet he did. The Home Office wanted evidence of Theo living in the UK; payment of tax and national insurance was not good enough. His citizenship

was refused because of the lack of his parents' marriage certificate, but, amazingly, this was found by a member of his family.

However, the Home Office refused to reconsider its decision, at which point I wrote to the then Home Secretary, now the Prime Minister, about Theo's case. She did not respond, but instead I received a letter from a civil servant. I raised the case in business questions with the then Leader of the House, now Secretary of State for Transport. He urged me to write to him, which I did. I received a response from the then Immigration Minister, now Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. There was no change to the Home Office position, but, chillingly, the final paragraph stated:

"It would appear, in this case, that Theo's siblings may have been erroneously issued with British citizen passports. If their full details, including their dates of birth, can be provided then the Home Office will investigate the matter further. If it transpires that the passports were issued in error, then it will ultimately be a decision for Her Majesty's Passport Office as to whether or not the passports can be retained, or should be revoked."

Theo is a deeply private man; he is not seeking publicity or attention. This particular correspondence highlights why he wishes to remain anonymous.

When the new Home Secretary was appointed in July 2016, I wrote to her. I received a response from the Immigration Minister, now the Children's Minister. The reason for my detailing all this correspondence is to show that this issue was known about long before the scandal broke, and that many Government Ministers have had their grubby fingers on it—in my constituent's case, five different Ministers including the Prime Minister herself. The faux outrage from the Government Benches is simply not credible when we know how many people had previous knowledge of the situation and did not act. It is only right that the previous Home Secretary has resigned, but it would appear that she has committed this act of self-sacrifice to divert the attention from the true culprit: the creator of this "hostile environment", the Prime Minister herself.

The impact on Theo has been enormous. This man who has worked all his life now finds that the impact on his mental health is so severe that he is unable to hold down a job. It is right that the Prime Minister has apologised for the wrongs that have been done, but how will she make up for the impact on his health, and how can she ever compensate Theo for everything he has lost?

6.30 pm

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): I want to start by mentioning the patronising way in which the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry)—who is no longer in her place—spoke to me earlier about countering the far right in her youth. Countering the far right should not be something that people can consign to their youth; they should make a lifelong commitment to challenging and countering those deplorable racist views. It is quite a privilege for someone to be able to leave it behind in their youth.

There have been many brilliant and moving speeches today about the Windrush generation. I want to address the question of the "hostile environment" more broadly. It is clear to anyone who has had any engagement with the Home Office that our immigration system is broken. It is a shambles and, in its present form, it has been

[*Laura Pidcock*]

constructed on a premise that is solely negative and suspicious of our fellow human beings. There has been a culture on the right and the far right and in the printed press that places immigrants and immigration at the heart of society's ills. That is both futile and inaccurate. I represent a constituency that has one of the lowest levels of immigration in the country yet, you know what, we still have hospitals that are underfunded, schools that are under immense pressure and a woefully inadequate transport system. None of those ills was caused by migration.

Returning to the question of our broken immigration system, I want briefly to outline some of the things that I think are wrong. People engaging with the immigration system have to wait far too long for a response. Deadlines for processing applications are not being met. The fees are extortionate, and there is little or no help or immigration advice. It is a complicated process. Passports, birth certificates and other important documents are lost. None of this has been created in a vacuum. The asylum process is degrading, frustrating and punishing, and many vulnerable, brave people are treated without respect.

The system is built on a presumption that everyone who wants to come to this country is a cheat and a liar who must be found out, and that their intention must be to defraud the system and to steal. Charges, borders, barriers, searches, detention centres, medical inspections, dawn raids, go-home vans, charter flight removals and hostile environments therefore seem necessary, but that is a flawed assumption based on a superiority complex. We might think, from the way some people talk in the press, that we have open borders, and we hear the perpetuation of the unfounded myth that migrants receive preferential treatment. Everything that has been said in this debate shows that that is absolutely untrue. Was I surprised to hear about the treatment of the Windrush generation? Absolutely not. It is not a shock at all. British citizens are regularly treated with contempt by this Government; it is nothing new. But now the mask has fallen, and we need some truth and honesty, starting with the publication of every single document relating to this fiasco, so that people can see and understand the scale of the problem.

We should not be shoved down the path of the good migrant versus bad migrant narrative. That language is wholly unnecessary, and it leads to two difficult endpoints, in which only the richest and most privileged people have freedom of movement, and the others who come here are often those who come in servitude to those people. What kind of society have we created, when those are the only two options? Where is the humanity in our immigration system? We must find it, develop it, nurture it and place it at the centre of whatever is built next. Pathologising human movement as though it were an affliction is not a route to a healthy society or a peaceful world. We can do so much better than this.

6.34 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock). I speak today as an immigrant who has lived in Bedford—one of the most diverse towns in the UK—for 26 years. I was fortunate to grow up in a tolerant environment, and I have always loved

my town, so much so that I wanted to work hard to give something back to my community. That was why I first got involved in local politics back in 2005, when I tried to give something back to a town that had welcomed me, but society is changing. To hear about how the Windrush generation—British citizens—have been treated is chilling for anyone who has come to live in Britain legally from Commonwealth countries and from elsewhere, and now even for EU citizens.

Like most MPs, I receive a lot of correspondence about immigration issues, including from people who want to go overseas to attend important events in their relatives' lives. Hearing the heartbreaking stories of British citizens not being allowed to leave the country to attend parents' funerals or a wedding or not being allowed home has been appalling. I have seen the effects of the hostile environment policy since 2014 and have felt the effects of a shift in attitudes towards immigrants—personally and through the stories that my constituents tell me.

In recent years, the Home Office has forced people from parts of Africa and the subcontinent to endure increasingly long waits to have their cases considered, labelling them “complex” and refusing to offer timescales or reasons for the delays. Such cases sometimes involve unaccompanied child refugees who, having made the dangerous journey to get here, have been left in limbo for years with no certainty that they will not be deported when they come of age. Entry clearance officers overseas now seem routinely to refuse visas from certain parts of the world, even when people have visited and returned several times before.

Things have felt different and difficult in recent years. The hostile environment has had a profound impact on our health service and on the social care sector. A manager of a nursing home contacted me just the other day to say she cannot get visas for qualified nurses. Nurses cannot get visas to come and look after sick, elderly patients in my constituency, in an out-of-hospital facility, because of Home Office policy. Meanwhile, our hospital is creaking at the seams and cannot discharge patients. The Government's decision to make landlords, local authorities, schools, universities and every employer into an agent of Border Force by requiring them to check people's status has created an environment of fear and suspicion. People have seen job offers withdrawn after incorrect information was passed from the employer checking service, and people have lost rental properties and university places.

Some of the Windrush victims have been detained in Yarl's Wood—a terrible place that needs to be shut down. Let us not forget that it is Government policy, and Home Office application of that policy, that has led to so many vulnerable people being detained indefinitely in that dreadful place on the edge of my constituency—

Mr Speaker: Order.

6.38 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friends who have raised shocking cases this afternoon. They have shone a light on the impact that treating people as numbers has had, and have raised wider questions. I have huge concerns about the Home Office culture that has been fostered by such policies. If we treat people as numbers, regardless of their individual circumstances, we all lose out, as we are now realising.

As an illustration, I raise the case of a young man from Sri Lanka to whom I spoke today. I cannot give his name. He has anonymity due to concerns for his safety, as the House will realise. This young man was trafficked to this country as a teenager after his brother was taken from school by the army and never seen again.

The young man claimed asylum in this country and agreed to give evidence against the international gang that had trafficked him. He was promised anonymity in the trial. He was promised leave to remain in this country, as he would be in danger from the gang's associates back in Sri Lanka. So he gave his evidence and helped the Home Office to put away the UK members of the gang. The Home Office even put out a press release to celebrate its success.

However, instead of protecting the young man whose evidence it had relied on over two days of cross-examination, the Home Office gave details of his asylum claim and his family's whereabouts to the defence. Very soon after the trial was over, the Home Office sought to deport him back to Sri Lanka. The defendants, who had shouted as they were sentenced that they would take revenge on him, thought their lucky day had come.

In spite of the young man's evidence, the Home Office's submission to his appeal said that

"consideration has been given to the criminal court judgement in which he was a credible witness, however this in itself does not present as a very compelling circumstance to prevent deportation." Even though a judge had ruled against his deportation to protect his safety, the Home Office sought leave to appeal against that ruling at the Upper Tribunal. Just last week, it succeeded in getting the asylum decision overturned.

The young man now has to go back to the First-tier Tribunal to have his case reconsidered. Having helped this country to put away the criminals who help people trafficking, and having helped the Home Office, he is now terrified of deportation and the revenge of the people traffickers.

I thank the Immigration Minister for having sat through the whole of this afternoon's debate, and I thank the Home Secretary for being here. Will they address why the Home Office is spending such vast sums on victimising people who have done their best for this country and who have done us a great service while putting themselves in danger?

What does it say to the victims of people trafficking? We need them to come forward if we are to convict those who continue people trafficking in this country. Will the Minister please look into this terrible case individually and see whether Home Office resources can be better spent?

I am afraid this is the result of a policy that treats people as numbers and that sets targets for deportations and net migration—that deports anyone it can. As we have seen, a huge effort is going into this, and that effort must go into a humane policy.

6.42 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George). I pay tribute to her for all the work she has done on behalf of her clearly very vulnerable but incredibly brave constituent. I hope the Home Secretary has listened to what she said and will look into that very worrying case.

I have three brief points. First, we need to understand what has happened and who took which decisions, when and how. We need that information because we need to prevent people's human rights from being overridden by bureaucratic fiat yet again—I am not convinced that will not reoccur.

My constituent Yvonne Williams is a Windrush generation daughter. She was kept at Yarl's Wood detention centre for eight months, and she learned just last week that she was due to be put on the plane back to Jamaica that so many Members have talked about in relation to their constituents. Last weekend, the decision was rescinded at the last minute and it appears that my constituent may well be able to stay.

My constituent is very well networked. She is well known in Oxford, and I was on her side as her local MP, but I am concerned about the large number of people who are isolated, who are not backed up by their MP, who have not been picked up and whom the Home Office may be missing. The Home Office will not know about those people if it does not understand why and how these mistakes were made.

Secondly, I want to make a point about the need for the Home Office to liaise with the Department for Work and Pensions. I have another case of a late middle-aged man who came to the UK when he was very young and discovered issues with his status only recently, when he was required to transfer from jobseeker's allowance to universal credit. I was grateful that the Secretary of State talked before about how he is going to liaise with other Departments, particularly to make sure people's access to services and to benefit is not compromised. What I want him to do, with the Ministers from the DWP, is make sure they get that message out there to the jobcentres, so that they do not turn around to people and say they will cut off their support. Instead they must say, "Right, we are going to help you because we know you've got a right to be here and we need to give you that support, via government and via the Home Office." Until now, they have been saying they are going to cut off the support.

I want to end by saying that the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) need to remain with us and ring in our ears as we walk out of the Chamber tonight. She set out clearly how the Windrush case is not necessarily anomalous; it is, sadly, a hallmark of a Home Office that has been described by people on both sides of this House variously as operating in an "arbitrary" manner, in an "unfair" manner, in a "punitive" manner and in an "incompetent" manner. That has got to change. This has to be the clarion call that changes that operation of the Home Office.

6.46 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Let me begin by thanking all the contributors this afternoon. The Windrush crisis has revealed something rotten at the heart of this Government: a blurring of the line between looking like an immigrant and being an immigrant. We can see now that race and immigration cannot be separated. Ministers have tried to claim that the Windrush crisis was a one-off. They have replaced the Home Secretary and pretended that that is the problem solved. Members have raised many individual cases this afternoon. For these people, the Home Secretary's resignation did not

[Afzal Khan]

put the issue to bed. We need to look back at what led to this crisis. We need to deal with what is urgently in front of us: justice for the Windrush generation. We need to look ahead, to make sure history does not repeat itself. If the Prime Minister orders her MPs to vote against this motion, it will expose the Tories' crocodile tears on the Windrush scandal as a sham. The British public will not accept a cover-up.

Looking back, we see that the Government were well aware of the risks in 2014 when they designed the hostile environment. They were told by MPs, by campaign groups and by their own civil service, yet the Prime Minister went ahead and implemented it anyway. The Government have known about specific problems with the Windrush generation for a long time, too; individuals have been contacting the Home Office for years, and the media have been giving voice to Windrush cases for six months. As the former Housing Secretary, the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) knows that the independent inspector sounded the alarm about the Government's right to rent scheme before Easter. They have known all this time, yet they cannot tell us how many people have been wrongfully deported, wrongfully detained, and wrongfully denied healthcare and public services. Ministers have been reluctant to come forward with the facts, and we need to know these right now. If the Prime Minister is too weak to be accountable, Labour will have to force her to be accountable.

Now that people are in this awful situation, the Prime Minister must urgently confirm the legal status of the Windrush generation. Ministers have spoken of "granting" British citizenship, but let us be clear: these people are already British citizens. Their citizenship needs to be confirmed, not granted, and indefinite leave to remain is not good enough.

The Government have set up a taskforce. Does it have the capacity to deal with all the cases in two weeks? Can it expand if the case load demands? The Government have said that they will take a generous approach. What exactly will be the burden of proof and when will we get that in writing? Application fees have been waived. Can the Minister confirm that people will have more than two weeks to apply and have them waived? Will the Minister confirm that the waiver applies to all administrative costs associated with applying?

When the Prime Minister was establishing the hostile environment policy, there was a cross-Government approach. We need a cross-Government approach to solving the crisis created by this hostile environment. What communication has the Minister had with the Foreign Office to train high commissions in the Caribbean to deal with Windrush cases? What discussions has the Minister had with the DWP and HMRC to ensure that, where there is evidence of residence and arrival, that is shared with the taskforce? What discussions has she had with the Justice Secretary on the re-introduction of legal aid for immigration cases?

The Windrush generation have suffered a great injustice. They must have access to legal aid. As part of the hostile environment, checks and balances on the Home Office have been removed. In 2013, the Tories exempted immigration cases from legal aid, so people cannot challenge wrong decisions. I hope the Ministry of Justice is paying close attention to this crisis. There will be other groups who are affected in the way the Windrush

generation have been. There are highly skilled migrants in the UK now whose visas are being refused on the basis of minor tax errors. The Government must reintroduce legal aid for immigration cases.

Justice for Windrush also means compensation. The Government accepted that there must be compensation for all those affected, and their families. The Home Secretary has said that this will be an independent process. What is the timeframe? How much has been allocated for it? Can the Minister confirm that compensation will apply to loss of employment, denial of access to benefits, public services and healthcare, as well as any shortfall in national insurance and pensions? Will it also cover the trauma, pain and suffering caused by the Government's reckless hostile environment?

Looking forward, we need a complete change of policy and approach in the Home Office. A change of face will not do. The Home Secretary has said he wants an immigration system that behaves more humanely and with a greater sense of fairness. That does not come about through warm words; it comes about through action.

The Windrush generation came to Britain to build our modern, global Britain after the second world war. In 2018, it is 70 years since the Empire Windrush docked, 50 years since the "rivers of blood" speech and 25 years since the death of Stephen Lawrence. The Windrush crisis is the shameful culmination of our history. We need to investigate what led to this crisis. We need to get justice for the Windrush generation and we need to correct our future course so that history does not repeat itself.

6.53 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): This afternoon, we have had thoughtful and passionate contributions from both sides of the House, which have reflected the public mood towards the Windrush generation, who have contributed so much to our country. We also had a debate on Monday, in which the tone was constructive; I listened carefully to Members' contributions then, as I have today.

We know that the failure of successive Governments to ensure that individuals arriving before 1973 had the documentation they need is deeply regrettable. I have previously said that I am personally sorry, and I repeat that today, but I also repeat how important it is that we put this right, as a matter of urgency.

Joanna Cherry: Will the Minister give way?

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Nokes: I will give way just once—to the hon. and learned Lady.

Joanna Cherry: I am grateful to the Minister. Will she apologise for the underlying policies that caused this scandal?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. and learned Lady made some comments earlier that I wish to respond to, but I really think it is important that I put on record how sorry I am that people have been affected, and how crucial it is to me that we make sure we get it right, and that, going forward, we make sure this cannot happen again.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said, putting this right must not mean taking resources away from the teams who are already working so hard to help those who have been affected. I have seen them working and know their dedication and commitment, which I saw this last weekend in Croydon and in Sheffield. That is why the Opposition's Humble Address motion is not the right answer.

We have announced a package of measures today to bring greater transparency to Members of the House and to the public. I would like to remind the House of those measures. First, the Home Secretary will be writing each month to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) with an update on progress. I have little time this evening to comment on her significant contribution, but I would like to say to her that it is important to me that we provide her with the updates and make sure that her Committee is aware of the progress. It is seldom that I say this on the Floor of the House, but I look forward to being called to her Committee as early as next week.

Yvette Cooper: I have put to the Minister, on behalf of the Committee, and to the Department about 50 questions so far, about half of them two weeks ago. So far, I think we have had only about five of them answered. When will they be answered?

Caroline Nokes: It is absolutely imperative to me—and indeed to my civil servants, who have been working incredibly hard—that the right hon. Lady not only gets the answers, but gets thorough and full answers. We will undertake to make sure that that happens as soon as possible.

Secondly, the Home Secretary will be writing to the right hon. Lady each month on the latest position on detention, removals and deportations. Thirdly, the Home Secretary will bring external oversight and challenge to a “lessons learned” review, which is already under way. He has asked the permanent secretary to give the review the resource that it needs.

The hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) shared with us her experience as a former Immigration Minister. She made some observations that I, too, have reflected upon in my relatively short time in this role, and she made some valuable points. It is clear to me that there are resources needed to put this right, and also to look forward and make sure that there cannot be similar occurrences again.

There has been much debate about the impact of the compliant environment on the Windrush generation. We are taking steps—important steps—to safeguard those from the Windrush generation seeking jobs or rented accommodation. We have published updated guidance on gov.uk, which encourages employers and landlords to get in touch with the Home Office checking service if they are unsure about individual status. The taskforce will contact the individual concerned to help them to prove their entitlement, and the employer or landlord will be issued with a positive notice to enable them to employ or register the individual.

The Home Office is working with other Departments. The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) raised the importance of my doing so, particularly with reference to working with organisations such as the DWP, the Department of Health and Social Care,

and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to make sure that not only Departments, but the partner agencies across the board, work to ensure that we have the relevant safeguards in place to prevent those from the Windrush generation from being denied the benefits and services they should be entitled to. Tomorrow, I will chair a cross-Government meeting to discuss those safeguards in more detail.

We have also been clear that ongoing enforcement activity must not impact on people in the Windrush generation. Immigration enforcement has put in place arrangements to minimise this risk.

Ruth George *rose*—

Caroline Nokes: Will the hon. Lady allow me to comment on some points that she raised at the end of the debate? It is important to me that I address them. It is absolutely crucial that we work very hard to make sure that we have immigration policies that are fair and reflect human beings—the people we know they are. That has been one of the most powerful elements of the Windrush crisis. I have seen and listened to the individual stories, and I want to make sure that they do not happen again.

The hon. Lady raised a case from Sri Lanka. I hope she will come to me with the individual's details, because it is important to me—just as when I assisted the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney), who is no longer in his place—that we work hard to solve individual cases. I recognise how time-hungry and resource-intensive that will be, but it is imperative that we get this right, and I know that the Home Secretary shares that ambition. The previous Home Secretary—

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister finish her sentence.

Caroline Nokes: The previous Home Secretary worked hard on this issue and spoke of changing the culture of the Home Office. I am absolutely determined that we do change the culture and work hard to right this wrong.

Mr Nicholas Brown *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Main Question put accordingly.

The House divided: Ayes 221, Noes 316.

Division No. 148]

[7 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Blackman, Kirsty
Alexander, Heidi	Blomfield, Paul
Ali, Rushanara	Brabin, Tracy
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Brennan, Kevin
Amesbury, Mike	Brock, Deidre
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Brown, Alan
Ashworth, Jonathan	Brown, Lyn
Bardell, Hannah	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Bryant, Chris
Benn, rh Hilary	Buck, Ms Karen
Berger, Luciana	Butler, Dawn
Blackford, rh Ian	Cadbury, Ruth

Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Drew, Dr David
 Duffield, Rosie
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glindon, Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hanson, rh David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George

Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jardine, Christine
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McInnes, Liz
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Osamor, Kate
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Pidcock, Laura
 Pound, Stephen
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve

Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, Mark

Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Nic Dakin and
Thangam Debonnaire

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria

Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie

Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard

Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti

Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob

Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Amanda Milling and
Nigel Adams

Question accordingly negated.

Simon Hoare: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have notified the hon. Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya) about this point of order. Earlier in the debate, I inadvertently misled the House in an intervention that she very kindly took during her speech in relation to Mr Tariq Mahmood of Peterborough. While it is true that Mr Mahmood has been found guilty of vote rigging and has campaigned and been photographed with both the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Lady very recently—he has also been a local Labour party secretary—I alleged that he was a member of the Labour party, but it transpires that he is just a Labour party activist, not a member. As I hope you know, Sir, I cherish this place very much, and I would not have sought to have misled it advertently.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said, and it has been duly noted. It will—or, alternatively, will not—be pored over by hon. Members who take a very keen, and even anorakish, interest in his pronouncements.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

LANDFILL TAX

That the Landfill Tax (Disposals of Material) Order 2018 (S.I., 2018, No. 442) which was laid before this House on 28 March, be approved.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Beauly

7.17 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I remind the House that, in 2008, United Kingdom taxpayers supported the Royal Bank of Scotland with an injection of £45 billion? We own the Royal Bank of Scotland—we own 73% of it—and our communities have stood by this long-standing institution. What is the repayment from RBS? It wishes to close 62 branches in Scotland, 13 of which are the last bank in town, and that will have a devastating effect on local communities.

RBS tells us that only 27 customers regularly use the branch in Beauly in my constituency of Ross, Skye and Lochaber, yet I was able to determine that there are actually 3,439 customers and 29,000 transactions annually. The Royal Bank of Scotland has been at the very least economical with the truth.

My constituents are alarmed at this potential closure. This is one of the branches that was given a reprieve, and I call on the Royal Bank of Scotland to make sure that the people of Beauly can continue to use banking services for the long term.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Ross, Skye & Lochaber,

Declares that the proposed closure of the following branches of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in the areas of Kyle of Lochlash, Beauly & Mallaig, will have a detrimental effect on the local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of these branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002144]

Proposed Closure of Accrington Victoria NHS walk-in centre

7.19 pm

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Accrington Victoria NHS walk-in centre, which has had 42,000 patient visits in the last 12 months and which offers 88 hours per week of GP service, is being replaced by an out-of-hours GP service, with just 19 hours available. When the walk-in centre closes, many people will simply go to the A&E at Royal Blackburn—one of the busiest A&Es in the country. That seems ridiculous, particularly when a patient visit to the A&E costs £120 on average but just £60 to the walk-in centre.

The people of Accrington and Hyndburn have spoken today. This petition has 10,000 written signatures and 14,000 online signatures—24,000 signatures in total. The Government must now listen to local people, show some common sense, step in and save this valuable service.

I would particularly like to thank Chris Reid and Kimberley Whitehead for helping with this campaign. I would also like to thank all the volunteers involved.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Hyndburn,

Declares that the petitioners are committed to defending NHS services in Hyndburn; and further that the walk-in service based at Accrington Victoria Hospital is a vital community health resource which must remain open, and that other NHS services in the area are being run down.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ensure that arrangements are put in place for the NHS in East Lancashire to ensure that the Accrington Victoria Hospital walk-in service remains open and that the closure of other NHS services in the area are halted.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002146]

Mental Health Services (Norfolk and Suffolk)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jo Churchill.)

7.22 pm

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Mr Speaker for granting this debate on mental health services in Norfolk and Suffolk and the challenges they face.

Quite rightly, the Government have talked a lot over the last few years about parity of esteem between mental and physical health and about the need to invest more in mental health services. Indeed, there has been limited extra investment in Norfolk and Suffolk. None the less, the NHS trust has faced challenges that are affecting the quality of patient care. Tonight is a good opportunity to bring before the House some of those issues and, hopefully, to offer some solutions and appeal to the Government to do more to help the trust in very difficult times, because ultimately it is the patients who suffer when trusts are in difficult circumstances.

First, I would like to pay tribute to Gary Page, who is the chair of the Norfolk and Suffolk mental health trust. Despite very challenging circumstances, difficult Care Quality Commission reports and the financial pressures that have faced services in Norfolk and Suffolk for many years, he has worked hard to make sure that there has been continuity. It is thanks to his leadership that the trust is now able to move forward and address some of the challenges that it faces with the quality of care.

I want to talk briefly about some of the issues involved, focusing mainly on ward closures and the points raised in the CQC report. I want to outline to the House some of the fundamental issues with staff shortages, which are probably the worst in almost any mental health trust in the country. I want to talk a little further about the finances of the trust, and I also want to talk about some of the difficulties there have been in how the trust works with addiction services and how that is counterproductive to the effective care and treatment of patients.

Although my medical work is not currently in the east of England, I want to draw attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a practising NHS doctor working in mental health services, which of course gives me some insight into the challenges faced by the trust, although I do not think that interest is particularly applicable in this case, because my medical work is not done in the region.

The quality of care challenges facing the trust are quite extensive. As the Minister will be aware, the trust was put into special measures in October 2017. There are significant pressures on beds within local services, resulting in higher numbers of out-of-area placements for patients. Many patients are now having to be transported out of area to be treated because of the closure of beds, which is not good medical practice. It is not good for patients either, because they will be a long way away from their support networks, and it interferes with the effective post-hospital care and rehabilitation that is so important in co-ordinating with community services.

The challenges appear to centre on patient flow into beds and delays to discharge. We know that there is a historical lack of community mental health services in

Norfolk and Suffolk, and investment has not been available to increase them at the necessary speed and rate. There are challenges with housing providers in the area not necessarily working closely enough with the trust, and there are also the pressures on social services that we know too well exist across the country. Those pressures are very relevant in Norfolk and Suffolk, where we have a lot of older patients with dementia who are struggling to be discharged effectively into the community because of delays in receiving adequate social services. A lot of the blame for that has been attributed to the mental health trust, but many factors are beyond its control.

The trust also faces significant challenges with the quality of its buildings infrastructure. Many of its buildings are old and not fit for purpose. The capital budget has not been available to improve the buildings, although there has been some new building work. I will come on to that in a moment.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): My meetings over the past three weeks with the new chief executive and others have given me cause to hope that the structural problems are now being addressed. A new co-produced community services partnership, commissioned by the clinical commissioning groups and involving Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, Ipswich and West Suffolk hospitals, the county council and the GP federation, is embarking on a level of integration that has never been tried before in the United Kingdom, working with district councils, schools and the voluntary sector to make mental health everyone's business. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government have a real interest in seeing whether that model can succeed? Will he support me in calling on the Minister to provide sufficient pilot funding for the project, so that Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust can recruit the staff it needs to make the new model capable of success?

Dr Poulter: I thank my constituency neighbour for that intervention. I entirely agree with everything he says, although I am not sure it is quite so pioneering—I think the hospitals in London would probably disagree with that. There is a lot of good work going on in London built around exactly that sort of model of more integrated care.

One of the challenges faced by the trust in the past, and which mental health trusts in general face, is the failure of many partner organisations to properly engage on issues such as the provision of adequate social care for patients with chronic and long-term mental illness and dementia. There is also the failure of housing providers to be involved and of the police to be properly involved. There is a big overlap between some people with mental ill health and presentation to the police, when they would be better looked after by the NHS.

This project is the right way forward, with more integration of services and better integration between mental and physical health. Many patients with chronic mental health needs have physical health problems. They are sometimes a side-effect of the drugs, but are often a result of a chaotic lifestyle. Better joined-up working with the local NHS undoubtedly has to be a good thing. For that to be effective, however, as we have seen in some pilot projects in London, there needs to be the funding to deliver it. The mental health trust is not in the best financial shape—I will come on to that

[Dr Poulter]

later—and support from the Government through funding for this innovative way of working, which I think is certainly a first in a rural area, would be very welcome. I hope the Minister may be able to provide some reassurance on that this evening.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour on securing the debate. Before he goes on to talk about the money, which is very important, does he agree that it is very important that the trust promotes and endorses local, tailor-made initiatives such as the trauma-informed approach currently being promoted in Lowestoft by mental health champions Tod Sullivan and Paul Hammond?

Dr Poulter: Yes, that is absolutely the right way to provide integrated services and joined-up care, because we cannot necessarily have a one-size-fits-all approach across Suffolk or Norfolk. We need to look at the local healthcare need. That is partly about working not just with housing providers, social services providers, primary care and GPs, as I believe is happening in my hon. Friend's constituency, but with the voluntary sector, other third sector providers and local charities, many of which have knowledge of the needs of patients, families and carers. When we are providing joined-up, holistic mental healthcare, it is just as important to make sure that the approach is joined up and holistic in that regard, and I believe that the project in my hon. Friend's constituency will have a very good chance of improving services for patients.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr Poulter: I will make a bit of progress first and give way in two or three minutes.

The challenge from a lack of bed capacity is acute; 36 beds have been closed in recent months, 28 of them temporarily to be reopened as soon as possible. One of the challenges, as my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) said, comes from the lack of joined-up working and a failure of commissioners, to some extent, to work collaboratively with the trust to identify short-term solutions. None of us wants to see patients travelling outside Suffolk. The commissioners have not worked well with the trust, because beds are available. My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who is unable to speak because of her Government role, has rightly highlighted that bed capacity is available at the Chimneys in Bury St Edmunds—18 beds, including specialist eating disorder beds, which are available and could be commissioned if the commissioners worked more collaboratively and supported the leadership of the trust more effectively. I hope that will come out of the collaborative and pioneering work on which the trust's partners are now supporting it.

None the less, there are some positive things to point towards. Building work is going on to deliver some new wards, and it is hoped that Lark ward in Ipswich, the psychiatric intensive care unit, will be able to reopen later this year. There are hopes that more can be done for child and adolescent mental health services, with continuing expansion in the number of beds.

Jim Shannon: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I sought his permission to intervene beforehand and told him why I wanted to. With the prevalence of mental health issues 25% higher in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom, and with our NHS unable to meet the demand on the service, does he not agree that mental health reform must be UK-wide and undertaken urgently, before people who simply need a bit of help to cope become people who need in-patient care and a strong drug regime to survive? Do it now and it can stop problems later.

Dr Poulter: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He is always a strong advocate for the needs of his Strangford constituents. He is right to highlight that early intervention and early support can be very effective. That is partly because it often prevents some of the other unwanted effects of having a mental illness. When people have been untreated for a long period, they may well lose their job and struggle with their relationships. A number of the supportive and protective factors that can help to support someone through mild and moderate ill health, such as being in work or in a supportive relationship, can be lost. If we can do more to help people in the early stages, that is a good thing—quite apart from it potentially reducing the number of acute admissions later on.

I want to make the important point that the staff shortages at the trust are one of the major challenges that need to be addressed. It is frankly, and I do not use this word lightly—I do not think I have ever used it before, even though we often hear it used by politicians—a scandal that there is such a shortage of staff at Norfolk and Suffolk mental health trust. I hope the Minister can think of better ways to fund and support the trust. Without enough staff, it cannot expand services or deliver safe services. The trust has struggled with CQC inspections because there are not enough staff on the ground to deliver the care it wants to deliver. That is not entirely the fault of the trust, however, as it is constrained by its funding.

I will outline some of the issues that the trust faces. It has had difficulty recruiting band 5 registered mental health nurses—there are approximately 125 full-time vacancies; there are 35 full-time equivalent vacancies for psychiatrists, partly owing to a national shortage, but also owing to particular challenges in the east of England; almost one in five medical posts at the trust are vacant—that means that doctors who should be there treating patients are not because of staff shortages; and 16.02% of qualified nursing posts are vacant. That is not acceptable or sustainable. If we are to improve patient care and help the trust to turn around, the fundamental issue of recruitment has to be addressed. There are fewer than 15 psychiatrists per 100,000 people in the region, which is much lower than the national average. In fact, the east of England has the fewest psychiatrists per head of population in the country.

Doctor recruitment is not a good story either. Issues with the junior doctor contract might not have helped, but we are where we are. Recruitment for CT1 junior doctors in 2017 saw only 16 of 45 vacancies filled—that is 36%—so only one third of the number of doctors who should have started training at CT1 level are working in the trust. That is a big rota gap to fill and will of course affect patient care. In 2015-16, about one third of ST4 vacancies in child and adolescent psychiatry

were filled. In general adult psychiatry, which is the bread and butter of psychiatry, only nine of 18 posts were filled in 2015. In 2017, only five of 22 posts were filled, which means that less than a quarter of posts for registrar trainees in general adult psychiatry are filled. The story goes on and is equally bad in older-age psychiatry—and we have a lot of older people with dementia to look after in the east of England.

Recruitment, then, is vital. We have to do more to recruit psychiatrists. The current strategies are not working, so I ask the Minister to look at what has been successful overseas—in Queensland, Australia, and other places—and to put financial incentives in place to support nurses and doctors to come and work in the east of England, because at the moment patients are paying the price for a lack of doctors on the ground. The trust is doing its best to recruit, but it needs extra financial support through Health Education England, and it needs to be given support and the go-ahead from the Department. We know from elsewhere in the world that financial incentives work in rural and coastal areas, as long as doctors and nurses are helped with a relocation package. The Department's successful health visitor programme is a good example of how financial incentives can work. I hope she will look at that.

The pressures on the trust's finances have been there for many years—since the merger of Norfolk and Suffolk mental health trusts—and we know that mental health has been underfunded nationally for decades. The trust needs £9.2 million to meet CQC recommendations for improvement. Some £4 million can be funded from the capital budget, but given that the CQC has criticised the building's infrastructure, it seems ironic to raid the capital budget for buildings and infrastructure and put it into the revenue budget to deal with immediate quality of care issues.

Even with that £4 million, however, there is still a shortfall of £5.2 million, and that was the subject of a recent funding bid to NHS England. The bid will be resubmitted fairly soon, and I hope the Minister will encourage NHS England to look favourably on it. It is important that the trust is given the financial wherewithal to deal with the quality issues raised by the CQC, to reinvest in vital community services and to undertake the vital work on integration that my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Ipswich, mentioned in his intervention.

There is some positive news. The ligature reduction project is proceeding successfully, and some good work is being done in the rebuilding programme at Chatterton House. The Norfolk and Waveney perinatal mental health service was launched in September. I pioneered support for the expansion of perinatal mental health services when I was a Minister, and I am pleased to see that it is now happening on the ground. In February a specialist perinatal mental health service was launched in Suffolk, which is a very good development. However, severe challenges remain and need to be addressed.

Finally, let me say something about services for patients with addictions. I will be brutally honest: I think that we created a problem with effective addiction treatment through the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The commissioning of addiction services has been transferred to local authorities, although the bulk of mental health services and physical health care for patients with addictions is still run by the NHS.

In the east of England, the amount invested in drug misuse services has been reduced by about £6 million over the last four years. Drug misuse is a serious challenge in areas such as Lowestoft, Ipswich and Norwich, not just as a result of underfunding but because those services are not working in a joined-up way with mainstream physical and mental health services. That must be addressed as a matter of urgency, because patients are falling through the net and not receiving the holistic care that they need. Many end up in the criminal justice system as a result, and the police and, in some cases, communities are picking up the pieces because of the failure to provide joined-up care for those patients. The lack of substance misuse services as part of any NHS system affects the dynamics and practicalities of good care, such as the sharing of information. Barriers are created, and the good intentions of staff on the frontline are undermined. That has an adverse effect, and I am sure that we will continue to see a rise in the number of drug-related deaths as a consequence.

Let me ask the Minister some questions. What additional support can be offered to the trust to help it to deal with its historical and current financial challenges and transform its services in the wake of the CQC's report? There is a shortfall in funding; the trust has submitted a funding bid, and I hope that the Minister will support it. What additional resources can be made available to improve the recruitment and retention of psychiatrists and nurses, and what can be done to attract junior doctors to the east of England? One in five doctors who should be at work are not there because of staff vacancies. What steps are being taken to stop the transfer of patients out of area for treatment? Finally, what can be done to ensure that there is proper integration of addiction services with mental health services in our region, to ensure that patients are given a better deal?

It is time for the rhetoric about mental health to join up with the reality, and for patient care to improve. It is time for Norfolk and Suffolk mental health trust to be given the support that it needs, so that it can do the best for its patients.

7.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) on securing this important debate. I also acknowledge his own contribution to the NHS, not just as one of my predecessors but, as he has explained, as a doctor. He was entirely right to raise in the House the challenges facing his mental health trust. I am not in any way sanguine about those challenges, but we are determined to see the trust perform better for my hon. Friend's constituents and for people throughout Norfolk and Suffolk.

My hon. Friend raised a number of issues, which I shall do my best to address. He mentioned the trust's bid for £5.2 million of capital with which to raise its facilities to an appropriate standard, as advised by the CQC. We received a number of good bids, some of them from trusts that were more financially distressed than my hon. Friend's and others that required more improvements. We could not meet all the bids that we wanted to, but may I, through my hon. Friend, encourage the trust to bid again, as we will look at it sympathetically? I hope that gives due encouragement for it to do so.

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

My hon. Friend is right that there are very challenging recruitment issues for that trust, and, as he has said, the vacancy rates for doctors are 19% and 16% for qualified nurses. That is particularly high. Central to dealing with that is the issue of leadership. We have a new chief executive in place, a new director of human resources, and a new director of nursing, and we are looking to them to lead the effort to recruit the necessary staff. The trust is also taking additional actions to deal with this. Hotspot areas have been identified and focused action plans are being implemented. As my hon. Friend said, this will include premium payments to encourage recruitment and help attract doctors and nurses to those locations. The trust is also running a series of recruitment campaigns and careers fairs, and is reviewing its skills mix and the appropriate balance of service. Rather than just leaving vacancies open, it is looking at using more occupational therapists and assistant psychologists, and at developing advanced practitioners. We are relying on good local leadership to deal with some of these challenges, but we pay close attention to what is happening there, and we will assist in any way we can to facilitate that improvement.

My hon. Friend mentioned out-of-area placements. At one time they were particularly high, but I am pleased to report that the trust has done a great deal to bring the number of out-of-area placements down. I am told that, as of today, there are eight intensive care out-of-area placements. That represents a massive downward trend from the high point of February this year, but the situation must be closely monitored, and I look forward to there being more co-operation and collaboration between the clinical commissioning groups, through the sustainability and transformation partnerships process, to make sure that there is the appropriate bed mix in the right places for that service to continue to be delivered.

An interesting point was made about integrating with other services, particularly housing, the police and addiction services. I believe that silo policy making tends to end in failure, and my hon. Friend is right that we must be much more joined-up and perhaps have interventions earlier in the process. There are particular points for intervention, such as when people start to hit the criminal justice system due to their addictions. Times of housing crisis also tend to be times when people are particularly vulnerable, and we are looking closely at that. I am not

going to pretend anything is perfect; all the issues my hon. Friend raised tonight are entirely valid, and we are looking at them closely.

Turning to local action to put things right, since the CQC report, NHS Improvement has supported the trust to address the major safety concerns and is chairing monthly meetings with stakeholders to monitor progress on improvement. I am also mindful, however, that the CQC might well re-inspect against the areas identified in the warnings notice imminently, which is only right. That will give us more intelligence about what needs to be fixed.

Central to our approach is that all patients must be kept safe and receive the highest quality care. My hon. Friend mentioned the number of bed closures; that was driven entirely by issues of patient safety. Those beds were on wards that were particularly undermanned, but the intention is that those facilities will be reopened once a safe level of staffing can be guaranteed.

I am pleased that the new chief executive officer has been appointed and that he started work yesterday. He has quite a big to-do list, it has to be said. Leadership is so often the crucial ingredient in resolving endemic issues such as safety and recruitment, and we will have a completely refreshed leadership team, including a new chief operating officer, a new director of nursing and a new HR director. We will be looking to that team to build the foundations to tackle the problems that my hon. Friend has identified. It is also important that we, along with NHS England and the Care Quality Commission, continue to support the trust as it leads itself out of these difficult circumstances. Further support is being given by an improvement director from the East London NHS Foundation Trust, which is rated as outstanding by the CQC and will act as a buddy trust. That support will focus on quality improvement.

There is not much more I can say in the limited time I have left, but I can tell my hon. Friend that this is obviously not going to be tackled overnight, and my door is always open if he wants to raise these issues again. However, we now have new leadership in place with a focus on tackling recruitment, and I believe that we can make progress. I re-emphasise that I encourage the trust to bring forward another bid for that capital.

Question put and agreed to.

7.51 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Division

TRIBUNALS AND INQUIRIES

That the draft First-tier Tribunal and Upper Tribunal (Composition of Tribunal) (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 22 February, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 202.

Division No. 147]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conon
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam

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

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

Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Ali, Rushanara
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Butler, Dawn
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David

Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Drew, Dr David
 Duffield, Rosie
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Gapes, Mike
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Glendon, Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter

Gray, Neil
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hanson, rh David
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McInnes, Liz
 McMorrin, Anna

Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Pidcock, Laura
 Rashid, Faisal
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Wilson, Phil
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 2 May 2018

[SIR HENRY BELLINGHAM *in the Chair*]

HPV Vaccination for Boys

9.30 am

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the case for HPV vaccination for boys.

I am delighted to find you in the Chair, Sir Henry. Before I start the substance of my speech, I want to place on the record my appreciation for the help I have received from a number of people, most notably Professor Christopher Nutting, one of the country's most eminent oncologists specialising in throat and thyroid cancers, and Peter Baker, the campaign director for HPV Action. I am grateful to them both for educating me. I am also indebted to Stephen Bergman and Jamie Rae, two sufferers from the condition we are going to discuss—I shall say more about them later. Finally, I place on record my appreciation of the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer). The Minister will understand that he cannot be here this morning; he has Government duties and a vow of Trappist silence as a Government Whip.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I have been there.

Sir Roger Gale: My hon. Friend the Minister indicates that he knows the problem only too well. My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green has done a significant amount of work in achieving the provision of human papillomavirus vaccine for gay men—a small but significant step in the direction in which I hope we may travel further this morning.

Until a relatively few weeks ago, I knew very little about this issue. I concede that entirely. Unlike one of my colleagues who was here in this Chamber yesterday morning while I was in the Chair listening to the debate, who had a relative who had died of bowel cancer, I have no personal experience. However, when I met Professor Nutting and Peter Baker, I was astonished at the speed with which they convinced me of the argument—and I am not a pushover when it comes to spending taxpayers' money. I think it is a no-brainer, and I hope to persuade my hon. Friend the Minister, and others, on this cause.

The human papillomavirus causes, among other things, cervical cancer, throat cancer, anal and penile cancers, and cancer of the back of the tongue. The virus is carried by about 80% of the population, which means somebody in this room is a carrier; it is not uncommon. I would like everybody to take that on board. Go on the tube in the morning and there will be dozens of people carrying the virus—most of it dormant, and a lot of it non-malignant. It is contracted in sexually active youth and, for men, usually in their teens or 20s.

The point is that it is a slow-burn issue. Its effects are not experienced overnight. A condition contracted as a teenager or at university may not rear its head for

30 years. We are talking about men now in their 50s and 60s, who some of the eminent people sitting behind me in the Public Gallery are treating, waiting that length of time without realising that they have anything wrong with them at all, because there is no screening process for men, unlike the screening process for cervical cancer.

I spoke yesterday to two people, Jamie Rae and Stephen Bergman—both sufferers, and both in their mid-50s—who described their experiences to me. I will not go into too much of the gory detail. I heard again this morning of another experience: somebody's colleague, himself an eminent surgeon, who had throat cancer and suffered many months out of work, which was a loss to the health service, damage to his family and, of course, the treatment. The treatment involves chemotherapy and radiotherapy; it may involve a tracheostomy; and it inevitably damages the saliva glands in the mouth, leaving the patient who survives with permanent dryness, considerable pain and ongoing discomfort. As I have indicated, there is also the social damage. Both Jamie Rae and Stephen Bergman described to me in graphic detail the processes they have been through and the discomfort—I use that word very modestly indeed—they have experienced. They described themselves as the lucky ones, because both those gentlemen have come through it relatively unharmed, but of course there are many others who do not.

The HPV vaccine has been available to adolescent girls since 2008. A pubescent girl of 12 or 13 is offered the opportunity to be vaccinated in school. The parents, quite properly, have a right to refuse that vaccine. Just in case anybody has any doubt, I am aware that there are a small number of cases where parents believe that things have gone wrong and that children have suffered as a result of the vaccination. That is medically unproven, but we have to recognise that the parents believe it. Parental choice is vital, and in the case of pubescent girls there is parental choice.

The process ties in directly with the Department of Health and Social Care's cancer strategy, which of course is about prevention. The Department has done significant work on preventing or seeking to prevent other prominent cancers. Lung cancer is the obvious one, and the anti-smoking campaign is highly relevant in this context. Melanoma is another; something that people of a certain age, such as myself, probably did not bother with at all has suddenly become prominent as the realisation of the damage that the sun's rays can do to the skin and the cancers that can arise from that has dawned on the population. Any responsible parent or grandparent now takes the trouble to ensure that their children have appropriate sunscreens at all times when enjoying the sun. HPV vaccine falls directly into that category. It is usable for prevention and, used properly, it works. That is proven. As I said, this has been available to adolescent girls since 2008.

We now come to the hard bit of the argument, because up until now I think everybody would probably agree that we are on a winner in using HPV vaccine, but of course there is the question of cost and efficacy. The argument has been deployed that herd immunity, to use the colloquial phrase, will mean it is not necessary to vaccinate boys, because if we eliminate the infection in girls, boys will not catch it from the girls. That is nice in theory, but wrong in practice.

[Sir Roger Gale]

I am told by those who know better than I do that the average young male has at least 10 sexual partners. The Minister might find that surprising; I did myself, but it is so. It depends whom we believe, but in the United Kingdom the vaccine has an uptake of between 70% and 83%, although in some parts of the country it is as low as 50%. A young man embarking on an exciting night out with his girlfriend therefore has a very high risk of contracting HPV from a girl who has not been vaccinated, and that is just in the UK. We overlay on that the foreign travel that many young people are now happily able to enjoy. Sometimes, with sun, sea and sand goes sex, and the risk of exposure to HPV in those circumstances can be even greater. Therefore, the idea that herd immunity will in time address the problem is fallacious, and this is where I have to accuse those who are responsible for taking the decisions—that is not the Minister—of short-termism.

I can see the attraction of the argument that extending vaccination would not be cost-effective and that herd immunity is coming downstream. Yes, the cases coming through now are historical, in the sense that the disease was contracted 20 or 30 years ago, so well before any immunisation. If we want to save money and damage health at the same time, that is quite a good way of going about it. I am seeking to persuade the Minister of the real value of having the courage—he is not lacking in courage—to take a long-term decision now.

The cost of immunising every adolescent boy within the relevant range in the UK is estimated to be, at the top end—this includes the purchase of the vaccine, which of course has to be negotiated by the health service, and its application—about £22 million a year. That is a lot of money, but in health service terms it is almost a bagatelle. Set against that, I am told by those with real experience, some of whom are sitting behind me in the Public Gallery, that there are about 2,000 patients a year—men in their 50s and 60s—who have developed throat, penile or anal cancers. The cost of treating those is about £21 million a year. Of course, that takes no account of the social costs and the other damage that can be done. In the case described to me this morning, of a surgeon who was taken out of play for a considerable time, the cost of treatment—of a replacement jaw, as well as the chemotherapy, radiotherapy, hospitalisation and everything else that goes with it—is looking like being somewhere between £50,000 and £100,000, and that is just one case.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend mentions the 2,000 people. Does he have an estimate of the total number of people who might be spared the effects of the virus if the actions that he proposes are taken?

Sir Roger Gale: I am afraid that I do not. The figure that I have is 2,000 people a year, so one has to assume that it is that—but it is growing.

The reason the condition is becoming more prominent, not less, is the change in sexual attitudes from the 1960s onwards, when practices that were previously unacceptable became acceptable. Oral sex, for example, became relatively commonplace. We can therefore expect, certainly within the next 10, 15 or 20 years, a significant rise in the number of cases. The discussion has to be about what

happens after that and whether the herd immunity actually works. I am arguing that it will not, for the reasons I have given.

I have talked about the slow burn, the 20 or 30-year wait, and the costs to the health service, on which the view seems to be, “Okay, fine. Let’s kick that into the long grass. It’s not our problem.” There will be 15 Ministers between the present one, sadly, and the time when people are developing diseases. However, the condition of genital warts, which is also caused by HPV, takes only three, four or five years to incubate, and the cost of that annually is £50 million, so do the maths. The economics of this are unassailable, and on those grounds I defy anyone to challenge my argument. The argument comes down to herd immunity. Will vaccinating girls do the job or not? I have made it clear that I believe it will not, and I think that the time has come for the Department to take a further long, hard look at the issue.

Up to now, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has indubitably taken a short-term approach to this: “Does it work? Well, yes, the vaccine works. Is it worth it? Well, not if we are vaccinating girls. Let’s see what happens—kick it down the line and save £20 million a year today,” even if that means that in 10, 15 or 20 years’ time we will be spending not £20 million but £200 million a year, which will be in addition to all the social costs. I understand that the JCVI will meet in the first week of June. We were promised that a decision on extending vaccination would be taken in 2015. That was deferred until 2017 and has now been deferred without a date being set for the final result.

Before I conclude with a request to the Minister, I want to say this. Chris Curtis, chairman of The Swallows head and neck cancer charity, sent me a video this morning. It was compelling, because he has been a sufferer himself and he described his own circumstances. I want to say something to the JCVI, to each and every member of that august body, who are of course medically qualified in a way that I am not. What I want to say on behalf of all the people who have been treated and have approached me is what Chris Curtis said at the end of his video. Friends, when you are thinking of kicking this into the long grass because it is not going to affect many people for a very long time and we do not have to concern ourselves with tomorrow, remember what Chris Curtis said, very starkly: “Tomorrow comes very quickly.”

I will not ask the Minister to second-guess the JCVI—that would not be right. I do not believe that this is his decision to make, in the sense that I suspect he is little more medically qualified than I am. Neither of us has the expertise to make this judgment. Will he please convey that sense of urgency about tomorrow to the JCVI, with the firm and genuine request that he wants them to take a long-term view, and to make the decision on the balance of long-term cost, not savings tomorrow?

9.50 am

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) on his address and on securing this debate. We have to remember two things. First, celibacy is about the only thing we cannot inherit from our parents. Sex may be adopted or forced on you, but it cannot be inherited, unless one is conceived in a glass

dish, which most of us were not. Secondly, HPV is a vector. It goes from male to female and from female to male. If I was to alter my hon. Friend's speech, I would say that the female, from whom the male may get the virus, probably got it from a male in the first place. We have to regard this as an almost endless chain of sexual engagement and the vector going on.

When I was involved in the HPV issue, it was to try to get the Government to bring in genital warts protection for females and to have that added to the cervical cancer vaccination. As it happened, the pharmaceutical company in the town I represent was making the vaccination that did not include it. Somebody came along and pointed out that this might mean a loss of trade for the particular business. I explained that the role and responsibility of a Member of Parliament—of the Government also—is not to put their constituency interest first, but to put the national interest first. My hon. Friend the Minister will not need any reminding that public health first means prevention of illness, then curing illness and then caring for those who cannot be cured. This issue is about prevention. The introductory speech should convince those behind the Minister to get things moving.

The arguments for delaying the addition of the HPV protection to the cervical cancer protection were scandalous. Adding to what my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet said, if we are looking for herd immunity, we should note that, as has been discovered in Australia, it comes twice as fast if young males are offered the protection at the same time as young females. There is the extreme case of those males who only have sex with males—the herd immunity will not get through to them, and that leads to 400 avoidable deaths a year.

The key point is to get herd immunity for everyone far faster. It seems to me blindingly obvious, in medical terms, public terms and cost terms, that the sooner that happens, the better. If there is some problem about the run-on of the existing contract only being for a certain number, I say to the Minister that no pharmaceutical company that I know supplying the national health service would object to having its order doubled, so that young males were included with young females.

We look forward to hearing that the Minister is persuaded and that he will give a strong nudge to the Joint Committee. We look forward, in time, to being able to congratulate my hon. Friend on achieving—with Government, the medical profession, the nursing profession and the affected communities—this progress, which has been too long delayed.

9.53 am

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. There is not much more that I can add to the presentations that have been made by my colleagues, but I want to make a couple of points. First, this is not simply about the sexual relationships of gay people. It affects all of us. My colleagues made that point firmly, but we need to make it again. Secondly, this virus is horrible. It is a disgraceful virus—to anthropomorphise a virus. We have heard the descriptions of the cancers that are induced by it.

I want to concentrate on the preventive powers of this vaccination for genital warts. There is a strong case for that. They may appear to be insignificant, but I do not believe that they are; they are much more widely

distributed among the population than the cancers induced by the virus. My hon. Friends the Members for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) and for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) have made a compelling case for the immunisation of boys, which I fully support.

9.55 am

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) for bringing this debate today. I participated in the debate in June 2016, which the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) brought to the Floor of the House. I am delighted to be here for this debate. I also congratulate the hon. Members for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) and for Henley (John Howell) on participating. I am slightly disappointed that more hon. Members are not here, because this is an important debate. It is especially important for hon. Members who happen to be men to understand the issue of HPV and their role in prevention.

Across the UK, the Governments of the various nations are progressing towards what I see as a progressive policy on HPV vaccination. As a Scottish constituency MP, I am delighted that the Government in Scotland are progressing that way and that this debate is taking place in the UK Government. In all good conscience, however, as a constituency MP I also have a role to highlight the issue around HPV and the need for men to be more aware of their role in sexual health, predominantly because this is a public health issue. A great amount of work is being done all over the world, which has impacted on people's lives.

We heard about issues relating to penile cancer. It would be interesting to know how many hon. Members know that men can get penile cancer. When I was the secretary of Cahonas Scotland, a male cancer charity in Scotland, we did a piece of work with a broad range of men from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The very idea of issues such as penile cancer was an absolute shocker to them. We showed them pictures of men wearing adult nappies. The lived experience of other men dealing with the impact of cancer related to HPV was profound and they did not know anything about it.

This is not just a sexual health issue, but a public health one. Knowledge is power. Knowing more about the issue and being able to make an informed choice to have the vaccination with parental approval is critical in ensuring that young men are protected for the future. Nevertheless, clarity is required—it is a challenge for me to say this to Governments across the UK—on why we are articulating a message about the numbers game, in which it is just about cost. If we relate that to the lived experience of men living with the consequences of not having the vaccination—I believe there may be some in the Gallery today—the clinical evidence needs to inform the economic choice. The clinical evidence is that the vaccination for young men will save lives. That is about understanding the consequences of the failure to give the HPV vaccination to young men. Governments across the UK should no longer be timid. We are being progressive at the moment, but timidity does not save lives.

There is also a difficulty at the core of this debate. In public policy debates on public health, it seems that those of us in the public policy arena—men,

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

predominantly—are abdicating responsibility by saying, usually through the herding immunisation argument, that the public health and sexual health of young men are down to young women. I do not find that acceptable. I can no longer stand as a Member of Parliament and look young women in my constituency in the eye and say that, from a policy perspective, abdicating sexual and public health to them is acceptable. It is the responsibility of policy makers to articulate a view that young men and young women have the right to this vaccination. In allowing that public policy narrative to continue, we as men are abdicating our responsibility to those young women. That is no longer sustainable.

Historically, it is now 100 years since women over 30 got the vote. How does that relate to this issue? It is about gender being at the heart of a public health debate. We are saying to young women that they are responsible for young men's sexual health, with negative consequences for young men. In the 21st century, that is no longer tenable. It has profound consequences for young men in the future, in relation to cancers, and it is the same stuff that we said to young women in the 19th century: "We'll just leave it to you when it comes to sexual health."

The hon. Member for North Thanet said that instances of oral sex were a new thing since the 1960s, but I have to admit, that is news to me. When I look at the historical narrative of sexual—[*Interruption.*] I sometimes feel as though I might have been born then. The historical narrative of sexual health has traditionally been an abdication of responsibility from men to women. One need only look at the friezes in Pompeii where oral sex is *de rigueur*. It was no different in the 18th century, when women had to tolerate the sexual norms of men who would have sex with other men and with sex workers, and when the attitude was that women just had to deal with sexual health issues.

In 2018, I make no apology for saying: not in my name. The young men of the UK deserve better, and the young women in my constituency should expect no less from me as their Member of Parliament than for me to say to Ministers—not just here in London, but in Holyrood, Belfast and Cardiff—that we need to take collective responsibility and stop genderising the public health debate. Only then will we create a more equal, fairer and far healthier society, in which young men have the opportunity to participate and acknowledge their role in sexual health and, in future, to live healthy sexual lives without fear of talking about sex or HPV—and, frankly, without having to tell parliamentarians stories of their sexual activity to bring a debate to the Floor of the House. That is no longer tenable and we need to rise to the challenge.

We need to say to young men and older men who are suffering from HPV that we will do everything in our power as politicians to meet the challenge they have placed before us. We need to say to young women that we no longer accept that they are responsible for the sexual health of young men.

10.2 am

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I thank the hon. Member for

North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) for securing this important and long-awaited debate, and for speaking with such knowledge and passion. I also thank the hon. Members for Henley (John Howell), for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) and for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) for their contributions. Although we are few in number, due in no small part to the local elections, that has been more than made up for by quality.

As we have already heard, 70% to 80% of sexually active women and men will acquire HPV at some point in their lives. Most healthy people will be able to clear the infection out of their system and will never know that they had been infected, but 3% to 10% of cases lead to serious health conditions. HPV is a major cause of cancers in men and women, and accounts for 4.8% of the estimated 12.7 million new cancer cases occurring annually among men and women worldwide.

HPV is linked to nearly all cervical cancers, 70% to 75% of vaginal cancers, 29% of vulvar cancers, 50% of penile cancer and 85% to 90% of anal cancers in both sexes. HPV can also cause genital warts, as we have heard, which is the most common sexually transmitted disease caused by the virus in both sexes. Why, then, do we vaccinate only girls, when men and women can be infected?

Since 2008, girls aged between 11 and 13 in the UK have been offered the HPV vaccination. My daughter was in the first cohort. As a parent, I was a bit anxious when the new vaccination was rolled out, but I need not have been. The vaccination programme has been mostly successful, with a high uptake of about 85% nationally, and it has made an important contribution to reducing the burden of infection among young women in the UK.

However, there are significant regional differences in the uptake of the vaccination, with the lowest level of uptake of two doses at 48.3% in my region, in Stockton-on-Tees, compared with the highest level of uptake in East Renfrewshire at 95.6%, which is astonishingly high. What steps will the Minister take to address those regional inequalities in the vaccine uptake? How does he expect a herd immunity philosophy to apply in areas such as Stockton in the north-east, where uptake is so low?

It is clear from the ever-growing evidence that it is time to extend the HPV vaccination to boys. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation believes that the high uptake in girls protects enough males and makes it cost-ineffective to vaccinate boys too, but that short-sighted view protects only heterosexual men who come into sexual contact with a woman who has been vaccinated, and leaves out a significant proportion of the population. Despite the high uptake among young girls, a heterosexual man still has a one in seven chance of meeting an unvaccinated woman in a sexual encounter.

Men who have sex with men are also unprotected by a girls-only vaccination programme. They are 20 times more likely than heterosexual men to develop anal cancer, but the men who have sex with men—MSM—programme being piloted in England will not be sufficient to protect that population.

Between 2009 and 2014, the median age of the first presentation of men who have sex with men to sexual health services in England was 32 years old. They are therefore likely to have been having sex for many years

before they attend a sexual health clinic. A recent study of men who have sex with men attending a London sexual health clinic found that 45% had a current HPV infection of a type that could cause cancer or genital warts, which suggests that a significant proportion of them will have already been infected before they are offered the HPV vaccination. Offering the vaccine in a sexual health clinic is too little, too late for men who have sex with men.

In addition, as we know, sexual health services are at a tipping point after demand for them increased by one quarter in the past five years, but at the same time, spending on them was cut year on year. Offering the vaccination in a sexual health clinic adds to the ever-growing demand on those services, but still excludes a significant proportion of the population and is far too late for some men.

The optimum age for the HPV vaccination to work is around 12 or 13 years old, when boys are unlikely to attend a sexual health clinic or may not be aware of, or willing to declare, their sexual orientation. The only solution to the problem is to offer the vaccine to both girls and boys while they are still at school and not sexually active. That will protect girls and boys from preventable disease.

HPV Action estimates that more than 2,000 new cases of HPV-related cancers are diagnosed each year in men in the UK. Like me, the Minister is passionate about reducing the incidence of cancer in this country. Extending the HPV vaccination programme to boys would be a step forward in doing that.

In response to a written question earlier this year, the Minister stated that the Government do not have an estimate of the number of boys and men each year who are left unprotected against HPV because of a lack of direct or herd immunity. However, HPV Action estimates that, with each year that passes, another cohort of almost 400,000 boys is left unvaccinated and potentially at risk of HPV infection and the diseases it causes. As the briefing I received from the Terrence Higgins Trust says:

“When we have a vaccine that can provide effective protection against such illnesses, it is unacceptable to maintain that vaccinating only one half of the population is sufficient to stop preventable ill health.”

HPV is not gender specific, so the vaccination programme should not be gender-specific either.

This is not a new philosophy. In fact, 14 countries are already vaccinating boys against HPV, or they will be soon. They include Australia, Austria, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and the US. Compared with their international peers, therefore, boys in the UK are at risk of being disadvantaged.

This is an opportunity for us to play a leading role globally in the elimination of cancer caused by HPV, but we are at risk of letting that opportunity slip away. Since 2013, the JCVI has been reviewing whether to extend the HPV immunisation programme to boys. However, the publication of a final decision has been deferred twice. The thousands of boys who go unvaccinated each year cannot afford to wait any longer and the JCVI must make a decision this year, preferably when they meet next month. I therefore urge the Minister to work with the JCVI as it comes to make its decision, so that both genders can be protected from these preventable diseases.

10.11 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry, I think for the first time. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) on securing the debate and bringing this important subject to the House. He was in the Chair the last time I was in Westminster Hall, which was just yesterday. I am surprised that so few Members are present for the debate. As the shadow Minister suggested, perhaps matters elsewhere in the House and outside are occupying their minds.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet mentioned, our expert group, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, is considering this matter, and it is important that I do not pre-empt its final advice, as he rightly said. That does make the timing of the debate challenging, but I will respond as fully as I can and give as much context as possible.

I will first set out some of the context. In 2008—before I was even a Member of the House—on the advice of the JCVI, an HPV vaccination programme for girls was introduced. The primary objective was to protect against cervical cancer. As the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) kindly said, my mission in life—not just in my job—is to challenge and beat that dreadful disease. While I am on the subject, I pay tribute to Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust and the brilliant Rob Music, who leads it—I know that the hon. Lady knows them well. The trust’s work in this area over many years, including with me as Minister, has been truly transformative for many women’s lives.

The HPV vaccine that is used in the UK offers protection against the two types of HPV that are responsible for about 70% of cervical cancers, and since the introduction of our vaccination programme the number of young women infected with HPV has fallen dramatically. Protection is expected to be long-term, eventually saving hundreds of lives each year, which I am sure we all agree is very welcome. Today, however, our focus is on boys and men.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Is the Minister aware of the paper on this subject by Dr Gillian Prue of Queen’s University Belfast? Dr Prue’s six recommendations are very similar to what the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) and others have put forward today. They include: first, that both men and women should be vaccinated against HPV-related diseases; and secondly, and more importantly, that the significant human cost of HPV-related diseases should be the primary consideration for including boys in vaccination programmes. If the Minister has not been made aware of the paper, I am happy to furnish him with the copy. Its recommendations are integral to moving forward on the issue.

Steve Brine: Not wishing to mislead the House, my honest answer is that I am not aware of that paper. Whether my officials are aware of it is another matter—I will ask them. I know that the hon. Gentleman will not be shy about putting a copy in my hand after the debate.

The good news is that HPV vaccination of girls also provides some—I emphasise “some”—indirect protection for boys. When the vaccination uptake rates are high, as they are in England, there are fewer HPV infections in heterosexual males, because the spread of HPV infection

[*Steve Brine*]

between girls and boys is reduced. There is evidence to back that up; it is not just words. For instance, diagnosis of first-episode genital warts in young heterosexual men between the ages of 15 and 17 declined by 62% between 2009 and 2016. That suggests that there is some—again, I emphasise “some”—herd protection from the existing HPV vaccination programme. However, that is not the start of the story, and neither is it the end, and I have to put it on the record that nobody in Government has ever said that it was. Nevertheless, I take the points that have been made today about herd immunity; it is only part of the story.

Of course, it will take much longer to see the impact that the girls programme has on HPV-related cancers, but we should not wait for those results before considering whether more needs to be done now for boys. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet said, this is a slow-burn problem.

Sir Peter Bottomley: It is just a matter of pure mathematics. If 100%, or nearly 100%, of any age cohort—male and female—gets the vaccination, the herd immunity develops much faster than just relying on vaccinating up to 50% of that cohort.

Steve Brine: I think that my hon. Friend is stating facts, and I know that the JCVI officials who are here today will have heard him.

The JCVI keeps all vaccination programmes under review, as it should, and it keeps Ministers informed of any reviews. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet is aware, given the increasing evidence about the link between HPV infection and oral, throat, anal and penile cancers, alongside the incidence of genital warts, the JCVI has considered whether HPV vaccination is now needed for males.

I understand the point that the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) made about the surprise about penile cancer. He has more experience of the subject than I do, but it is not a surprise to me. I work with a very good charity called Orchid Cancer, some of whose staff attend my cancer roundtable regularly. It deals with male cancers and is trying to raise awareness of penile cancer as a challenge in society today. It is an issue that is difficult for society, let alone for men, to talk about. I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he has said today.

The JCVI considered its current piece of work in two parts: first, whether the HPV vaccination should be introduced for men who have sex with men—MSM—and secondly, whether it should be introduced for adolescent boys. MSM, as we know, are a group at high risk of HPV infection. Unlike heterosexual men, of course, they are unlikely to receive much, if any, indirect protection from the HPV vaccination programme for girls. The JCVI advised us that a targeted HPV vaccination programme should be introduced for MSM up to the age of 45 who attend genitourinary medicine clinics or HIV clinics. Following a successful pilot in 42 clinics that was led by Public Health England, we announced in February that the programme would roll out across the country from April, and it is now being rolled out. That programme is welcome, but again I fully appreciate that it is not the start and it is certainly not the end of

the story, for some of the reasons that the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West set out in her very coherent remarks.

Let me turn to the issue of adolescent boys. Of the non-cervical HPV-associated cancers, not all cases are caused by HPV—indeed, the percentage of cases that are attributable to HPV is widely debated. My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet mentioned The Swallows, which I do not have much contact with, although I have heard of it. I passed a note to my officials asking them to get in touch with the charity as a result of this debate, so it should look out for that. For head and neck cancers, alcohol is an important risk factor to take into account, but HPV does play a role, and that is why the JCVI is considering whether vaccination for boys should be introduced.

The JCVI issued interim advice on HPV last July. As Members know, that was subject to consultation. It is reviewing the evidence ahead of finalising its advice to Ministers. Its members are the experts, and they are best placed to consider the evidence and provide advice to Ministers. That is the system that Parliament has mandated. Parliament could change it, but that is our system.

Sir Peter Bottomley: When the Minister sends a report of this debate to the JCVI, it might be worth him respectfully saying that some of us here are aware of how long it took it to agree to bring in HPV protection even for females. It might want to consider whether postponing that decision was right or wrong. In my view, it was wrong. The people at the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV knew that it was wrong, and it took an awfully long time for them to change their minds. Can we please ask them respectfully not to make the same mistake again?

Steve Brine: Those people are nearer to my hon. Friend than he knows, and they will have heard his point.

In his opening remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet asked the JCVI to take the long view, and I hope that I can reassure him somewhat on that point. Some examples of what the JCVI is taking into account in its considerations include: the projected future number of HPV cancers resulting from the current incidence of HPV infection; the potential savings as a result of preventing future cancers, which a number of Members have mentioned; the potential savings from preventing genital warts; and, crucially for my hon. Friend's point, the long-term impact of HPV infection up to 100 years into the future, which will outlive even him.

The JCVI's interim advice indicated that to vaccinate boys would be

“highly unlikely to be cost-effective in the UK, where uptake in adolescent girls is consistently high”.

It is true that the UK has achieved high uptake for the girls HPV immunisation programme for the past 10 years. In 2016-17, 83.1% of girls completed the current two-dose course, including the daughter of the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West. I have two young children—one of each—and of course those of us who are parents want what is best for our children. Somehow arguments about cost-effectiveness do not feel right. Cost-effectiveness is important, however, because it is about how to fairly, consistently and robustly assess

which interventions and treatments should be funded in what we must remember is a publicly funded health system. We need to deliver value for money for the taxpayer and deliver the most health benefit possible to all patients. That is our system.

Mrs Hodgson: I take on board what the Minister is saying for areas where uptake is high but, as I cited earlier, there are parts of the country where uptake is nowhere near high enough, such as Stockton, where it is 48%. How does that work? How does that argument stand up for those parts of the country?

Steve Brine: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. I was hoping to have a note to respond on that specific point about regional inequalities, but I will have to write to her. Perhaps it is something we can discuss offline. That very good point has not been raised with me recently, but I will take it away and follow it up.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet did not mention discrimination and equality, but other Members certainly did. I accept that equality needs consideration in this case, and I confirm that the Department is carrying out an equality analysis. That cannot be completed until we have received the JCVI's final advice and we know what it is advising and why, but I can confirm that officials will make contact with key organisations such as HPV Action—I met members of it recently at a roundtable I held on cost-effectiveness methodology for immunisation programmes and procurement, and I know that some of them are here today—as they progress the equality analysis to ensure that such views are taken into account. I confirm that the equality analysis will be published, and I will make the House aware when it is.

There have been a number of threats of judicial review related to equality and sex discrimination in relation to HPV vaccination. I do not think it would be appropriate to say more at this stage, but the House will have heard those two commitments.

Mrs Hodgson: On the equality point and the herd immunity point, may I raise the issue of men who have sex with men and the fact that their first presentation at a sexual health clinic could be at the age of 32? Again, there is no way for there to be herd immunity or even for us to extend the vaccination, as we have done in the pilot, to men who have sex with men. There will still be huge numbers of people not covered. Does the Minister agree, and what is he going to do about that?

Steve Brine: The hon. Lady makes her point, and it is not one that I miss, I assure her. That issue forms part of the ongoing deliberations. She has made that point twice, and it is a good point.

I know there are concerns, to put it mildly. My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet set out the timeline of how long it is taking the JCVI to finalise its advice. However, the consultation raised some important, complex issues around the cost-effectiveness model, and it would be remiss of the JCVI not to ask for those issues to be addressed before it puts the matter on its agenda and makes its final decision. I appreciate that my hon. Friend and other Members want the advice quickly—believe me, so do I—but I cannot advocate asking the JCVI to cut corners, which would call into question the quality and robustness of its advice and undermine an internationally respected organisation. The JCVI will

get its advice on boys to me as soon as it can, and I am certainly expecting it this year. As soon as I have it, we will turn it around as quickly as we can.

I am totally committed to our world-leading vaccination programme. It is an area where this country leads the world. I am as keen as my hon. Friend and other Members present to hear the JCVI's final advice on HPV vaccination for boys as soon as possible. The JCVI has helped successive generations of Ministers and, as my hon. Friend said, it will help those who come after me—there will be many, and maybe sooner than we think. It has helped Ministers make decisions that are fair and justifiable, and we need to allow it to complete its advice without too many distractions that could slow it down even further, which no one wants.

We have heard an impassioned case for an HPV vaccination programme for boys from, among others, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West, for whom I have so much respect. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) suggested, I will send a transcript of the debate to the JCVI to ensure that in the unlikely event there are any issues it was not aware of, that can be reflected in its final advice. It is listening to the debate today. For the reasons I gave at the start of my remarks, I cannot give the House an indication of when exactly a decision will be made, or what that decision might be—trust me, I would love to—but I can say that I will prioritise consideration of the JCVI's final advice as soon as I receive it.

10.28 am

Sir Roger Gale: May I first thank you, Sir Henry, for presiding over this debate with lenience, and for allowing a frank discussion of what is clearly a sensitive subject? When we do not write speeches, as I do not, we fly by the seat of our pants and ad lib. Inevitably, we miss things. I am therefore particularly grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) and for Henley (John Howell), and to the hon. Members for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) and for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who clearly has a tremendous grasp of the subject. Together colleagues have put flesh on the skeleton that I sought to create at the start of the debate. I am very thankful indeed for that.

I hugely appreciate the candour with which the Minister has spoken and the positive attitude he takes to this difficult issue. I also understand that from his point of view the timing is not easy, given the imminence of the JCVI discussions. I hope and believe that as a result of all the representations that have been made, not only in this debate but across the piece, the JCVI will now take what to some of us is the obvious decision and, for a relatively small amount of money, create a much better environment for both boys and girls in the future.

To conclude, the Minister said that he had two children. I have five grandchildren. We cannot wait. I quote again the remarks that were made earlier: "Tomorrow comes very quickly."

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the case for HPV vaccination for boys.

10.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Prison Officers: Working Conditions

11 am

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the working conditions of prison officers.

Before I begin, I should explain that I have three prisons in my constituency, and I have raised regularly in this House issues that concern people working in them. As I have done on many other occasions, I pay tribute to the fantastic men and women who work in Elmley, Standford Hill and Swaleside on the Isle of Sheppey. I am immensely proud of those dedicated, hard-working professionals, who work in an extremely challenging environment, facing the threat of violence almost daily with few complaints and a great deal of courage.

Violence is not the only issue that concerns prison staff—I intend to talk about numerous other issues later—but I will start by addressing it. Ministry of Justice figures show that violence in our prisons is at its highest level since records began. In the last quarter, there were 21,270 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, of which 3,029 were serious. At the same time, there were 8,429 assaults on prison staff, of which 864 were serious. In one quarter alone, about 4,000 serious assaults took place. Given the nature of what constitutes a serious assault, I suspect many were carried out using some form of offensive weapon.

The Serious Crime Act 2015 made it an offence to be in possession in prison of an offensive weapon, so I would expect action to have been taken against those assailants. However, during 2015 and 2016, there were just 149 prosecutions, which hardly seems to be a deterrent to potential troublemakers. Such a low prosecution rate means that offenders know that if they attack a prison officer, they will probably get away with little more than a slapped wrist.

The lack of prosecutions against violent prisoners by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service has been a long-standing bugbear of mine. I have pointed out on a number of occasions—I make no apology for doing so again—that if a police officer is attacked while on duty, the full weight of the law rightly comes down on the attacker. However, if a prison officer is attacked while on duty, too often nothing happens. That cannot be right.

There are a number of reasons for the increase in violence, and I will touch on a few of them. There has been an increase in organised crime in prisons. I have heard stories of prisoners resorting to violence to avoid the risk of early release because their criminal activities in prison are so lucrative. There has also been an increase in the number of gangs in prisons: they are behind much of the organised crime, including the supply of drugs, which is big business.

The use of drugs in prisons is a huge problem, as I am sure we are all aware. A steady supply is smuggled in by visitors, corrupt prison staff and, increasingly, drones. My local prisons have introduced drone-exclusion zones, but they have no real means of enforcing the ban. The problem will be solved only by installing in every prison a system to detect, track and jam drones before they reach their destination.

Another concern is the increased incidence of prisoners smoking Spice and other harmful drugs in their cells. When prison officers enter the cell, they are at risk of harm from inhaling the lingering smoke. I know of a young prison officer in one of my prisons who was seriously affected by the inhalation of Spice fumes and had to be sent home because he was so ill. To counter that, gas masks should be made available to prison officers who enter cells in which it is suspected that an inmate has been smoking harmful substances, such as Spice. Stemming the flow of drugs is essential, and prison officers believe that the task of detecting drugs will be improved by the use of more sniffer dogs in prisons. I urge the Minister to consider that.

Drugs are not the only issue making the management of our prisons difficult. Mobile phones are also a big problem, as they are used to conduct much of the illicit business in prisons. People perhaps do not realise that mobile phones can be used to take photographs of prison officers, which can be sent to contacts outside the prison, who then intimidate them. The Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Act 2012 was supposed to help solve that problem by allowing phone signals to be blocked, but I understand that there have been difficulties implementing the Act. That is why I welcome the new Bill going through Parliament, with Government support, which will make it easier to prevent the use of mobile phones in prisons.

Combating prison violence can be problematic for a number of reasons, including the lack of control in some prisons. For instance, the Prison Officers Association alleges that prison managers sometimes fail to stick to the agreed regime management plans, which are put in place to set out work practices based on the number of officers available at any given time. The POA claims that some prison managers ignore RMPs because they fear the reaction of prisoners if they are not allowed out of their cells, even if there are not sufficient prison officers to supervise them. That leads to too many prisoners being unlocked without proper supervision. I should add that there is no evidence that that is happening in my three prisons.

That leads me nicely to another problem: the lack of prison officers. The Prison Service is in the process of recruiting more officers. Like the POA, I welcome that recruitment drive, but the influx of new recruits has presented its own challenges. Under benchmarking, the Prison Service lost thousands of experienced prison officers. They have been replaced with young, inexperienced officers, who are being asked to manage increasingly violent prisoners. We must do our bit by giving them the tools they need to do their job safely and effectively. One such tool is PAVA—pelargonic acid vanillylamide—which is similar to a pepper spray and is widely used in the police force. The Prison Service is piloting the PAVA in four prisons, and the results have been extremely positive.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I rise as the co-chair of the justice unions parliamentary group. He made a comparison with police forces. I have taken part in the police service parliamentary scheme, which enables MPs to gain a fuller understanding of the nature of the work that we expect public servants, including prison officers, to do. Will the Minister consider establishing in prisons something along the lines of the

police service parliamentary scheme so that Members of Parliament can go into that environment? I appreciate it is very dangerous, but we could none the less learn much from it and take away much that would be of benefit to our public servants.

Gordon Henderson: I welcome that intervention, and I will talk about that issue later in my speech.

I met my local police chief inspector, who happens to be a very small woman, and she said that, without PAVA, she would not be able to do her job on the beat. Between November 2017 and February 2018, HMP Bedford recorded 23 assaults on staff, of which two were classified as serious, whereas, HMP Preston, which has a larger prison population, recorded just eight assaults on staff, of which one was classified as serious. It cannot be a coincidence that, during that period, officers in Preston were issued with PAVA, but those in Bedford were not. The use of PAVA seems to be a no-brainer. I urge the Minister to roll out its use and issue PAVA to all prison officers in all prisons without delay. I would also like to see made available to prison officers rigid handcuffs, radios and body-worn video cameras.

The environment in our prisons gives rise to another big concern. Unlike police officers and firefighters, prison officers have to work until they are 66 years old. Over time, that will increase to 68.

Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): My hon. Friend is coming on to changing the pensionable age for prison officers. Recently, I visited HMP Dumfries in my constituency and was most impressed by the prison officers and the standard of their work. They expressed concern about the pensionable age being 68—as they put it, 68 is too late. I agree with them. Not everyone is physically robust at that age and, if they are not, does my hon. Friend agree that those prison officers should be found jobs in offices so that they need not be on the frontline?

Gordon Henderson: I certainly agree with that, but the problem is, what happens when the administrative jobs run out? What do we do with them then? I think there is another solution. Police officers and firefighters have dangerous and physical jobs, which is why they are allowed to retire early. Prison officers, too, have dangerous, physical jobs. I believe that the time has come to allow them the same rights as their colleagues in the police force and the fire service.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I have a number of personal case studies from prison officers at the prison in my constituency. One of the issues that they have flagged up is that changes have, in effect, blocked their ability to be promoted, because to accept promotion, officers have to sign up to the lesser conditions, so we are losing the experienced officers whom we so need to run our prisons. Is my hon. Friend aware of that and does he share those concerns?

Gordon Henderson: Yes and yes. That is just another example of the way in which those in the Prison Service—prison officers in particular but also other prison staff—are treated as second-class citizens of the public service. It is time for us to treat them in exactly the same way as police officers and firefighters.

Equalising the retirement age, for example, would help to make the role of a prison officer more attractive, as would increasing the salary structure. It is difficult to recruit prison staff because they are paid less than other public sector workers, such as border staff. A lot of prison officers who leave the service become border staff. Is it any wonder that a very small minority of corrupt prison officers are tempted to earn money on the side by turning a blind eye to criminal activity in prisons?

As I have pointed out before in the House, it is particularly difficult to attract staff to work in Sheppey's prisons, because local people can earn more working in a warehouse than they can working in a prison. I believe that my prison staff are worth more money, and they should be paid what they are worth. There is also a frustration among prison officers that they are seen simply as turnkeys. That, too, is wrong. They are not jailers. They are not prison guards. They are prison officers. They should be treated with the respect that their position deserves.

One way to enhance esteem for prison officers would be to make better use of them in other roles, such as in the provision of education and healthcare to prisoners. An inmate is more likely to respect a prison officer if they know that that officer is helping them in some way. That is simply human nature.

I am not expecting—surprise, surprise—the Minister to wave a magic wand and to deliver immediately all the measures that I have suggested. However, it would be nice if he at least acknowledged the important role of prison officers and pledged to start some of the reforms needed to make their working conditions better.

Finally, I have another special request to make of the Minister—the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) touched on this earlier. I was invited by my local prison officers to spend a day with them on the frontline. I agreed straightaway. I thought it would be a good way of understanding better the conditions in which they work. But I made one condition: I would join them only if I was able to wear a uniform and to be treated in the same way as a prison officer, so I could really know what was going on at the coalface. I am sure other right hon. and hon. Members with prisons in their constituencies would like to do the same. Unfortunately, the Prison Service ruled that I would not be allowed to take part in such an exercise. I would be really grateful if the Minister encouraged the National Offender Management Service to change its mind.

11.14 am

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson). It is important for the Houses of Parliament to focus on prisons and in particular on the service of prison officers. As my hon. Friend pointed out in his substantial and eloquent speech—he is extremely well informed, with three prisons in his constituency—and indeed as my hon. Friends the Members for Dumfries and Galloway (Mr Jack) and for Henley (John Howell), and the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts)

[*Rory Stewart*]

pointed out in their interventions, we have a very strong debt of obligation towards our prison officers. Prison officers are very unusual uniformed public servants. They generally operate outside the public eye, and prisons are not places that the public generally visit. That is why I wish to come on to that good idea of a parliamentary scheme suggested by hon. Members.

The job of prison officers is very unusual. On the one hand, it has some of the features of the job of the police, in so far as they are dealing with criminals and therefore with a lot of violence and trauma but, on the other, a particular set of skills is also required. Unlike a police officer, a prison officer may often see the same individual hour after hour, day after day, week after week and even year after year, having to provide a moral exemplar for such individuals on their journey towards ceasing reoffending. Prison officers are helping to educate and support them, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey pointed out, in everything from healthcare through to employment.

The challenge presented by my hon. Friend is what we can do practically to help prison officers in their daily work—and, my goodness, they face a challenging situation.

John Howell: I am fascinated by the idea of providing opportunities for Members of Parliament to work in prisons. I happen to be the deputy chairman of the Industry and Parliament Trust. Will the Minister work with me to see whether the trust might develop a form of fellowship to take the idea forward?

Rory Stewart: My hon. Friend makes a very generous offer. We are incredibly interested in that, but the real thing that we need to make the idea work is Members of Parliament prepared to do it. If the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and even my hon. Friend the Member for Henley are interested in being part of a parliamentary scheme, we really have got something to take to the head of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service: I can say not just that this is a theoretical idea, but that we have real, living Members of Parliament who are genuinely interested. We can set up a pilot scheme, learn from what happens in the armed forces and the police service parliamentary schemes, and look at the potential support suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley. That would be an incredibly useful thing.

For anyone listening to the debate who is not aware of such schemes, the amazing idea behind the armed forces and police parliamentary schemes is that Members of Parliament can see for themselves what people are going through on the frontline. In fact, legislation considered on Friday, partly on behalf of the police, was driven in part by the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who had been on the police scheme and had been inspired by seeing the action of police officers. So the scheme has changed legislation here in Parliament.

To accelerate, what useful things can we do for prison officers, apart from paying tribute to them for their extraordinary service, intelligence, commitment, honour, loyalty, courage and resilience, and for the way in which they work with unsociable hours and difficult people?

Concretely, there are three different types of thing. My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey touched on terms and conditions, but that I will not touch on today, because we are in confidential discussions with the public sector pay review body, looking at exactly the issues raised, such as those of how we move people from the pre-existing closed-term contracts to the new fair and sustainable contract, and the difference in salary compared with other employment opportunities.

To give one small example, of which my hon. Friend is probably aware, in the Isle of Sheppey we pay an increased amount to attract people away from competing professions, such as in transport or the police, to get them to work in the Prison Service. There is much more to be said about that, but I want to talk concretely about the equipment that we can bring in to try to make a prison officer's life better. We talked about PAVA spray—pepper spray, in other words. My hon. Friend also talked about the introduction of rigid handcuffs and discussed other equipment being proposed, including suggestions for stab-proof vests, body-worn cameras, which we are rolling out across the estate, and CCTV. All that will increase the confidence of the prison officer in dealing with the prisoner.

We also need to be able to prosecute prisoners who assault prison officers. We were very proud, on Friday, to be able to double the maximum sentence for anybody who assaults a prison officer from six months to 12 months. But that requires the Crown Prosecution Service to bring those prosecutions. Too often, as my hon. Friend pointed out, there has been an attitude that, somehow, assaulting a prison officer is different from assaulting a police officer on the street.

Gordon Henderson: That is a particularly sore point with me. The CPS standpoint has always been that it is not in the public interest to prosecute a prisoner who is already in prison. It may not be, but it is certainly in the interest of the staff who have to suffer those assaults.

Rory Stewart: It is 100% in the public interest to prosecute prisoners who assault prison officers. If they are not prosecuted, the authority of the state is undermined; it becomes almost impossible for prison officers to run a decent and human regime, very difficult for people to be unlocked from their cells and difficult to move people into education and purposeful activity.

If the education and purposeful activity and the decent and safe environment of the prisoner are not delivered, the prisoner is much more likely to reoffend when they leave that prison. That is a direct threat to public safety; therefore, as my hon. Friend implies, the Crown Prosecution Service must prosecute prisoners for attacking prison officers. We owe that to prison officers, but we also owe it to the public as a whole to have safe, clean and decent prisons. These are our prisons; in the end, prisoners are citizens who come out and reoffend on the streets. We have to restore discipline.

My hon. Friend spoke about drugs and the importation of mobile telephones. In the end, those issues can be dealt with. There are basically only five ways in which mobile telephones or drugs can get into a prison—after all, there is a fence around the prison. They can be thrown into the prison, flown into a prison, dragged into a prison, posted into a prison or carried into a prison. Every single one of these ways needs to be addressed.

We address the issue of people flying things into prisons by tackling drones; of people throwing things into prisons by the use of nets and proper yard searching; of people dragging things into prison by identifying the wire set-ups that run into prison windows; and of people posting things into prison—for example, a letter impregnated with Spice so it can be smoked can be photocopied. But we have not been good enough in England for nearly 40 years is searching humans going in and out of prisons.

Scotland is different. I venture to suggest that it is not a coincidence that the violence and drug rates have been lower in Scottish prisons and that there has been much more regular routine searching of people going in and out of Scottish prisons. I do not think that is an accident. I would be very interested in working with the Prison Service to pilot in 10 prisons increasing the security and routine searching at the gate, to see what would happen. But that will not be enough—many other things need to happen. At the core are people: the prison officers themselves.

There is no point in my standing here and pontificating about the Prison Service because there are more than 100 prisons. With the best will in the world, even if I visited two prisons a week, I would not be able to visit them all in a year. There are more than 20,000 prison officers and 84,000 prisoners. In the end, good prisons depend on good people. That is about recruiting, training and promoting the right kind of people and managing people in the right way.

How do we recruit the right kind of people? We search for exactly the values we are looking for. We train them by focusing on institutions such as Newbold Revel, the prison officer training college, to make sure people feel proud of being prison officers. I am very interested in reintroducing the passing out parade—getting families in to applaud people as they graduate from that training college, so that they feel they are extraordinary public servants, protecting our nation through their work. They need to feel that in their uniform, in their passing-out parade and in every day of their work.

We need to get the training right when people enter, and when people move into the custodial manager role. We need to think about how supervisory officers on the units, even if they do not have formal line management responsibilities, can mentor and drive those young, inexperienced staff. In many prisons, 60% to 65% of prison officers have been there for less than a year; we

need supervisory officers to be able to work with them, to give them the confidence and the jailcraft to manage those prisons.

Then, we need to think about what happens at the governor level. How do we make sure that we do not end up in the situation that my hon. Friend found in a prison in his constituency, where there were four governors in five years? We need governors to stay longer in the prisons. We need them to be formally trained before they arrive in those prisons. One of the key determining features in trying to work out why one prison is performing well and another is not has to do with questions that are very difficult to put on paper. We sit here and look at staff numbers, drug levels and the age of the building, but the biggest constant is always the human factor: the culture of that prison and the prison officers, the nature of the leadership and management, the morale of the place and the way in which people work together.

This has been a really important debate. From our point of view in Parliament, we are very proud that there are three Bills on their way through the House of Commons that will help prison officers. One of them is doubling the maximum sentence for assaulting a prison officer. We have another Bill going through that will focus on new psychoactive substances and testing of drugs in prison. We have a third Bill going through the House that focuses on excluding mobile telephones from prisons.

Legislation on its own is not enough. It is about public understanding and support for one of the most unique, precious and impressive services that we have in the United Kingdom. That is why I believe that the proposal, made today by my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, and supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley, of a parliamentary scheme focused on telling Members of Parliament about the Prison Service will be an enormous help in getting legislators to understand how much our prisons matter to our society and, above all, understanding how much we owe our prison officers.

Sir Henry Bellingham (in the Chair): I congratulate the Minister on an outstanding speech, made just from schematic light notes.

Question put and agreed to.

11.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Reduction of Plastic Waste in the Marine Environment

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): We come to a debate about Government policy on reducing plastic waste in the marine environment. Everyone can see that quite a large number of Members wish to speak. I ask colleagues to bear that in mind when they make their speeches. I may have to impose a time limit. I call Mr Alistair Carmichael to move the motion.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government policy on reducing plastic waste in the marine environment.

It is a pleasure, as ever, to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. Another week, another debate on plastics in the marine environment. I welcome the Minister back to her now familiar position. I consider myself fortunate to have obtained this debate, and I am delighted to see such a healthy turnout of Members from all parts of the House.

This issue has become quite fashionable of late. It has certainly come to public attention since the BBC screened its “Blue Planet” series last year. But what people now understand is something that I as an islander, and others who live in coastal communities, have known for some years—that the amount of plastic in our marine environment has been growing exponentially for years and is now a massive danger to us all. People just have to walk along any beach to see that. The part of the world I represent is famed for its clean environment, but the number of coffee cups, food containers, fishing nets and ropes that we find even on our otherwise very attractive beaches provides evidence of that. That is actually the easy stuff, because we can remove it with beach clean-ups, but it does not remain on the beach; it is taken back out to sea and reduced until it eventually becomes much more difficult to remove from the marine environment.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that Europe and the USA are responsible for only about 2% of ocean litter? Although it matters not to a dolphin or turtle where the plastic it is being strangled by or choking on came from, that means that those of us who wish to address this subject need to focus on rapidly developing countries with inadequate waste disposal systems.

Mr Carmichael: Absolutely. I read recently that about 90% of the plastic in the world’s oceans comes from 10 rivers in Africa and Asia. I say to the right hon. Gentleman, though, that an awful lot of things are going to have to change, one of which is how we see and think of the marine environment. It has frustrated me for years that things that happen on the high seas are out of sight and out of mind. That applies not just to this issue but to things such as shipping standards. The way we ship oil around the world occasionally comes home very graphically when something goes wrong and there is a major oil spillage.

I come back to how I, as an islander, see the world. So many people see the sea as something that divides us from other places; as an islander, I see it as something that joins us to other places. People who take that view understand that with that attitude comes a shared responsibility for ensuring that our marine environment is as clean as it can be. However, the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that what we do in this country is only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. Inevitably, we will need to work much more closely with people in other parts of the world. I will touch on that later.

The Environmental Audit Committee estimates that we use about 2.5 billion single-use cups, and that only one in 400 of them is recycled. Consider the report in *The Guardian* today about the way in which wet wipes are changing the shape of our river beds. Thames21 found no fewer than 5,453 wet wipes on 116 square metres of the Thames embankment near Hammersmith. Of course, what starts in our rivers eventually ends up in our oceans.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this extremely important debate. Before he moves off the subject of cups—this may be a matter that you wish to raise with the House authorities, Sir Edward—is it not absurd that we are having this debate surrounded by non-reusable plastic cups? Surely, we in this Parliament should lead the way by replacing them with glasses or at least reusables.

Mr Carmichael: I presume that the hon. Gentleman is, like me, a signed-up member of the campaign for a plastic-free Parliament. I was fortunate to be given a coffee glass by the World Wide Fund for Nature as I came to the Chamber. He is absolutely right—that is just one good illustration of how we have become so cavalier about our use of plastics.

We all know—we have seen the pictures—where plastic ends up. Turtles mistake plastic bags for jellyfish and eat them; plastic debris is lodged on coral reefs, which affects the health of the reef and has an impact throughout the marine food chain; and microplastics are consumed by animals as small as plankton, work their way up the food chain and are eventually consumed by us at the top.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Let me go back to the issue of wet wipes. There is a lot of misleading information on packets, which suggests wet wipes are flushable and leads users to believe that they are biodegradable. In fact, all that means is that they pass through the U-bend and end up in the system, as he described. That is an important advertising and packaging issue, which should be addressed by the makers of wet wipes.

Mr Carmichael: Although I am delighted that a Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is here, this issue will impact on just about every area of public policy if we are serious about tackling it meaningfully. The Government’s role is probably the most significant, but I am resistant, as ever, to the notion that the Government can do everything for us. There are any number of interests at play and places where behaviour can be changed for the better.

There is a role for us all as individuals—in particular as consumers. If we say to supermarkets, “No, we’re not going to come to you. We will go to a supermarket like Iceland,” which has committed to reducing plastic packaging, every supermarket will soon sit up and listen. I recently got my Friday lunch in the Peerie Shop café in Lerwick, and I was gladdened to find that it now has compostable knives, forks and spoons in its takeaway section. That is not a massive expense, but it is a demonstration of commitment—and a demonstration of that café’s commitment to providing what its customers want. There is a business incentive and imperative here.

There is also a role for local government. The provision and operation of recycling facilities will be crucial. We will doubtless talk about the operation of a deposit return scheme, which I hope will increase massively the amount of material there is to be recycled. In fact, it is a bit like flushable wet wipes—there is no point gathering recyclable material if we do not have the capacity to recycle it. Among the representations I received ahead of the debate was a fairly minded one from Harrogate Water Brands, which produces water. It explained that a lot of the plastic that is described as single use is single use only because we do not recycle it, and pointed out, quite fairly, that only about half the material in the plastic bales that local authorities supply for recycling can be used for recycling, as opposed to 95% in the United States and 99% in France.

There is a role for business. I commend Sky in particular, which has not just run its ocean rescue campaign but, in its business operations, taken the goal of becoming plastic-free seriously. It has a target of being plastic-free by 2020. I was struck by the difference that will make. One company of a reasonable size—but not that big—says that by

“eliminating plastic from all Sky offices...it is estimated we will save 560,000 water bottles and 7 million coffee cups per year through our operations.”

That is a good illustration of a company responding to what its customers would want.

Then there is the role for Government—or perhaps I should say Governments. As I said in response to the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), 90% of plastics in the oceans come from 10 rivers, and tackling that will obviously require international co-operation. That is the nature of the marine environment; UK action alone will not be sufficient.

I will have some questions later in relation to a specific international issue, but I hope the Minister will have noted Sky—a significant company but one that is not that big—and its target to be plastic-free by 2020. That goal contrasts, in a way that should raise questions, with the targets set by Government for our economy as a whole, which would take us closer to 2040. When Government action and targets are being so outstripped by corporate effort, perhaps we should consider whether we are being ambitious enough.

I welcome the ban on microbeads, although it is still not complete. A microbead that is washed off someone’s face may not be allowed to enter our watercourse or our oceans, but surely a microbead could enter the watercourse and the marine environment if it came from a suntan lotion or similar. A complete ban on microbeads would be the logical conclusion to the brave and innovative work already taking place.

I welcome the commitment to introducing a deposit return scheme, but the detail remains sketchy. I appreciate that we have yet to hear about a consultation, but we should be able to agree on the broad principles. I commend to the Minister the work of Greenpeace, which has come up with some fairly broad headings that she could do worse than include in her consultation. The first of those headings states that there should be no cost to central Government, with administration funded by the scheme, and cost savings for local authorities. Secondly, the only cost to consumers should be to those who do not return the containers they purchase and pay a deposit on. Thirdly, there should not be a cost for small retailers, for a whole range of reasons—our small shops and retailers are already struggling in the current environment—but there is a strong case for including larger retailers in such a scheme. Fourthly, it suggests charging producers an administrative fee for each container manufactured, and a one-off contribution to start-up costs.

Surely we can agree that, at its heart, a deposit return scheme should include all sizes of vessel—and, indeed, plastic, metal and glass. Only then will it be effective. The Minister will be aware that the Scottish Government have already started down this road, and that is the approach they are taking. I suggest there is a benefit to us all in having a single scheme across the whole of the United Kingdom.

James Gray: I am puzzled by the bottle return scheme. Of course, on the face of it, it is a good thing: in so far as bottles are recyclable, we can bring them back into use and that is great. However, what happens to the non-recyclable materials gathered back through those means? Surely that material will end up in landfill, as it does at the moment. What will we have achieved?

Mr Carmichael: I am not sure that I share the hon. Gentleman’s understanding of what is involved in the return scheme; of course, the consultation is there for that, if necessary. To take his hypothesis as correct, at the very least we would have succeeded in separating the different constituent parts, and that in itself is valuable.

I am conscious of time and the number of Members who wish to speak, so I will try to canter on. The last concern on which I seek the Minister’s comments is the introduction of a so-called latte levy: a surcharge for the use of disposable cups from coffee shops. The Marine Conservation Society recommends something in the region of 25p for each non-reusable drink cup, or indeed a reduction for those who bring a cup to the store themselves. There is a parallel with the plastic bag levy introduced under the coalition Government, which has been a spectacular success: there was an 85% reduction in the use of plastic bags in the first year of its operation. Is that because when we hand over £100 or whatever for our weekly supermarket shop, we think, “I’m not going to spend another 50p on plastic bags”? I do not think so. The introduction of the levy made people consider their behaviour and the impact it would have. I suggest to the Minister that a levy of the sort proposed by the Marine Conservation Society would have a similar impact and could be transformative. I commend it to her for departmental consideration.

I have some technical points in relation to the revision of the EU directive on port reception facilities and how that will impact on campaigns such as the fishing for

[Mr Carmichael]

litter scheme, an initiative run by KIMO that I have supported for many years. In view of the time I have taken—notwithstanding interventions—I will spare the Chamber my comments on that, but the Minister can expect them to land in her correspondence bag in the near future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. I will impose a five-minute time limit on all Back-Bench speeches.

2.47 pm

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this important debate. I suspect that most of us in the Chamber watched “Blue Planet II”, which reminded us—if we needed reminding—of the magic of the natural world. We were sickened by the sight of those giant, swirling plastic continents—some are bigger than France—that we have created. More than 1 million birds and 100,000 sea mammals and turtles die each year because of the plastic we continue to dump—some 12 million tonnes globally a year. We learnt that 90% of all seabirds tested last year were found to have plastic in their gut.

We have treated the environment with contempt, like a giant rubbish dump. It is hard to imagine anything more stupid. It appals all normal people. None of us wants to be part of the problem, but most of us, if not all, are, simply because it is so hard to escape plastic—it surrounds us. There are plastic cups, which have already been identified, as well as plastic water bottles, sandwich wrappers, plastic knives, forks and spoons, plastic straws and plastic stirrers, which inexplicably are still available in so many pubs. Totally unnecessarily packaging encases so much of the food and other products we buy in supermarkets.

We need to recognise and understand that as a consequence of a form of market failure. These things are used for a few seconds but last in the environment for many hundreds of years, and it is not the producers who pay the cost; we all do. This is a clear area where the market has simply failed to spot the cost of these products, which is why Government action is not only important but absolutely essential.

It has to be said that, relative to other Governments and other countries, what we have done is impressive. The 5p bag levy, which has already been mentioned, has been a tremendous success. We have banned microbeads and are therefore world leaders in that department. Our commitment to bring in the deposit return scheme for bottles and other products, and our commitments to ban straws, those absurd stirrers and plastic cotton buds are all excellent. I salute the Secretary of State for the leadership he has shown. Nevertheless, relative to the problem we face, those are baby steps, and we need much, much more.

We need to set up an urgent plan, a roadmap toward a genuine zero-waste society, and part of that must mean banning single-use plastics across the board and making it easier for the recycling business to recycle what we use. It is crazy, for example, that all local authorities have different rules on recycling. That just creates a confusing mess, and the sheer variety of plastics

on offer does not help. We should be seeking to limit the range of plastics available, as Japan has done, to make it easier for things to be recycled and to make it certain that those products that are used can be recycled.

Where companies make things that cannot be recycled or repaired, they should be subject to some kind of higher tax, which can itself be recycled to pay to help those companies that are doing the right thing. That tax would, in a sense, be their paying for their own pollution footprint. Where companies are doing the right thing, we should help them. For example, the big retailers are a huge part of the problem today, but they could so easily become a huge part of the solution. The laggards need to be pressed by Government, and the pioneers need to be helped, perhaps through VAT reductions or reduced business rates, which could be paid for through those pollution taxes.

To know what is possible, we need only look at those pioneers. In January, we heard from the supermarket chain Iceland that it was to become the first major UK retailer to eliminate plastic packaging for all its own-brand products within five years. Iceland, by the way, was also the first big supermarket to ban the use of palm oil, which is devastating the world's forests, particularly in and around Indonesia.

I will cut back what I was going to say, or I will run out of time. As has already been said, this is not just an issue for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or the Treasury, but an international issue, and therefore an issue for the Department for International Development. We have already heard that 90% of waste enters the oceans via just 10 rivers. That must be a priority for DFID, and I think we would find that even those people—not myself, I have to say—who are sceptical of that Department's existence and our commitment to spend 0.7% of our annual budget on it would find this an issue that we should prioritise. I think Government action in that regard would be met with a big round of applause.

To give one example of those rivers, I discovered this morning that the Yangtze carries 1.5 million tonnes of plastic into the ocean every year. The Thames carries just 18 tonnes. That shows the sheer scale of the problem coming from some rivers, and it should be a priority.

I have something to ask the Government to do, before I add my complaint about the plastic cups, but I am going to reverse the order. I cannot tell hon. Members how many Select Committees have written to the House authorities saying, “We've got to get rid of these plastic cups,” how many individual MPs have echoed those demands in their own private letters, how many people have signed petitions or how many people have joined campaigns for a plastic-free Parliament. It is absurd that the cups are still here. I cannot understand it. Is it apathy? Is it incompetence? Is it lack of interest or laziness? I do not know, but there is no justifiable reason why they should still be here today. I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will take that message to the highest levels.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Gray: On a point of order, Sir Edward. The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) has just made is terribly important. It is hard to understand why the House authorities have

not taken note of our calls for the abolition of plastics in Committees. Is this not a message that you, as the Chair, should be able to take to Mr Speaker and the Committees of the House, in the hope that they will finally listen to us?

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I am sure that all colleagues will exercise their good judgment.

2.54 pm

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and to speak in this timely and important debate. I will go back to May 2017, when Greenpeace's ship the *Beluga II* visited the Bass rock in East Lothian, bringing with it water sampling equipment to test the microplastics in the area. The Bass rock is important because it is the world's largest northern gannet colony. The children who came out to see the *Beluga II* were so excited, enthralled and enthused by what they saw that they took up a beach clean and took it upon themselves—aged between seven and 11—to clean up the beach. They did that having spoken not just to those who come out and advertise such things, but to the scientists who were on the ship, who explained to them the damage that the plastic did.

That work moved on in East Lothian with Surfers Against Sewage, a group that rightly has great interest in what is in the seawater for its sport. It worked with Dunbar primary school, one of only 20 schools to have been awarded the title of ocean guardian, and works year on year with beach cleans of that sort. Hugo Tagholm, the chief executive of Surfers Against Sewage, has said that it is willing to provide the basic equipment for beach cleans. More importantly, it says:

"From grassroots to Government, the time to act is now."

That is why today's debate is so timely, because what happens in the very near future will make such a difference to our seas.

We have already heard mention of the Sky Ocean Rescue campaign. When the plastic whale, which has also visited Parliament, visited Musselburgh in my constituency, children flocked to see it. But they also went down again with the rangers of East Lothian Council to clean the beaches of plastic. I was privileged to be with them when they were interviewed by Sky. The children did not say they were doing it because Sky was there. They did not say they were doing it just for half a day away from school. They were stunned that people still dropped litter.

These primary school children understand something that, apparently, people forget as they grow older. They were aghast at what they found on the beaches. When it was suggested to them that perhaps it was teenagers who had dropped all the bottles, they said, "No it's not; it's adults," and they picked the bottles up. That is testament to our young people and their understanding of and connection with the environment, which is something to be hopeful about and something we should promote.

In East Lothian, we have a charity called Fidra, which looks at the problem of nurdles. Nurdles are the small plastic balls that go to make all the plastic bottles we see. Nurdles are how raw plastic, for want of a better description, is transported around the world, and they make up an astronomically large proportion of the

plastic damage in our oceans. The difficulty is that, much like the microbeads, once they get into the water, they are impossible to get out. Fidra is working hard with companies to change the way that nurdles are transported and to change business procedures, in order to prevent spillages and prevent the nurdles getting into the ocean.

Fidra also uses beach cleans to raise awareness of the matter. Working with children at Yellowcraig, a truly beautiful beach in East Lothian, over 400 nurdles were collected in just five minutes. That is a phenomenal amount to have washed up on a beach. Industrial spillage and mishandling then cause nurdles to float and travel around the world.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I also attended a nurdle hunt in North Queensferry with members of Fidra. While there is a great sense of displeasure from children and parents that this is happening to their beach and their environment, what steps can we take to get that message through to the people who produce the plastics in the first place, to ensure that we do not have to have beach cleans, but can have a policy that prevents it from happening in the first place?

Martin Whitfield: That intervention brings me on to Operation Clean Sweep, an agreement that has come up from the plastics industry and is supported by both the British Plastics Federation and PlasticsEurope. The Operation Clean Sweep manual provides practical solutions to prevent nurdle loss for those who make, ship and use nurdles. The key message, of course, is good handling to reduce pellet loss and pellet use, which in turn goes to the type of plastic being used.

However, the work by young people, volunteer groups and charities will not be enough without political and, if necessary, legislative support. The EU is promoting the target of 2030 as the year by which member states should have phased out single-use plastics. The UK Government's proposal of a 25-year environment plan appears to be, with all due respect, more of a repackaging of existing policies and previous announcements—I sincerely hope that the repackaging is not in plastic. It is our children who go to beach cleans, and our surfers who use the water. Through the conduit of the plastic whale and the nurdle hunts, they attack this issue with passion, enthusiasm and commitment. Unfortunately, those children will be in their 30s when the Government have caught up. We owe them more than that.

3 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate. Like him, I represent a beautiful area of stunning coastline; it is one of only three constituencies that have two separate coastlines. I grew up in Cornwall and have noticed over my lifetime—growing up and spending as much time as I possibly could on beaches—the increasing amount of plastic being deposited from the sea on to our beaches and how that developed into something that we could no longer ignore. It is almost as though, collectively, the British public have had a lightbulb moment. For generations we have been abusing the seas that surround our country, seeing them as just a dumping

[Steve Double]

site where we could throw anything, but we have suddenly come to the realisation that we cannot go on vandalising the seas that surround us.

A team effort has got us to this point. Hon. Members have mentioned the role that “Blue Planet II” played in bringing this issue to the public’s awareness. There has also been the Sky Ocean Rescue campaign. Newspapers have been involved; the *Daily Mail* has run a campaign on the issue. That has all contributed to getting us to this point.

I also pay tribute to the Cornwall-based charity Surfers Against Sewage, which I work closely with as chair of the Protect our Waves all-party parliamentary group. That charity has been campaigning since 1990 for us to stop abusing our seas and take action to clean them up and improve the quality of the water. It started by focusing on sewage and recently has been working to address the way plastic is affecting our oceans. Just two weekends ago it mobilised 35,000 people—I understand that it was one of the biggest volunteer mobilisations in the country—to carry out beach cleans right across our country, and they collected more than 65 tonnes of plastic from our beaches in just one weekend. That demonstrates just how much plastic is washed up on our beaches every day of the year.

Just as it has taken a team effort to bring this issue to the public’s awareness, so we now have, I believe, an unstoppable national grassroots movement, which is determined to address this issue, reduce the amount of plastic that we use and stop plastic polluting our marine environment. It will take a team effort to address it, and I believe that much of the pressure will come from consumers as they begin to demand that retailers and industry use less plastic in their packaging. I encourage every member of the British public to use their power as a consumer to force industry to make the necessary changes and cut back on the amount of plastic we use.

Clearly there is also a role for Government. We should congratulate the current Government on the action they have taken to start to address this issue—far more than any previous Government—and we should be proud of them for that. I am talking about the 5p plastic bag charge, which has resulted in 9 billion fewer plastic bags being used in our country, the microbead ban, the action to address straws and cotton buds, and the commitment to find a way to bring in a deposit return scheme to increase recycling.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Gentleman for outlining those measures, many of which came from the Environmental Audit Committee, on which I and other hon. Members in the Chamber serve. That Committee also suggested charges on disposable coffee cups, which has not come forward as a measure. What does he think about charges on disposable coffee cups—the so-called latte levy?

Steve Double: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I agree that there has been a team effort within Parliament. The Environmental Audit Committee has played a role, as has the APPG that I chair. Many hon. Members, on both sides of the House, have played a role in sending a clear message that the Government need to take action, and the Government have responded

and acted in a very responsible way to start to address that. The coffee cup challenge is a difficult one. It is very easy to say what we will do, but we have to work with industry to find a sustainable solution that will reduce the amount of plastic that we throw away and not do untold damage to our economy in the process. It is therefore right that the Government think carefully and consult on these issues; they must work with the industry.

Only yesterday, I met a company—it happens to be an Israeli company—that thinks it has found the solution to the coffee cup challenge. I hope that it will be able to bring that forward, but we also need to recognise that, in the supply chain, businesses have invested tens of millions of pounds in the current packaging system and it is therefore unrealistic to expect them to throw away that investment overnight and change the way they do things. We need to work with industry to come forward with sustainable solutions to the problem. I would love to see action taken, but we must ensure that it is the right sort of action. It is therefore right that the Government consider the issue carefully, rather than just jumping to a conclusion.

In the time left to me, I will make a point that has already been made. This is a global problem. It is very important that the UK takes a lead—that we get our own house in order so that we can take a lead internationally on the issue—but we have to work with other countries. It was good to see the progress that was made recently with the Commonwealth countries. Many of us would like to have seen more progress, but a step was taken forward, which is very welcome. We also need to use our influence around the world, through our aid budget and the Foreign Office, to ensure that we call other countries to account and that global action is taken to clean up our seas.

3.6 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on bringing this issue forward for consideration; I thank him for that. All the speeches so far have been excellent. I was raised learning that the Earth is the Lord’s and all within it belongs to Him. I was taught to be frugal and thrifty—or, as the girls in my office say, as an Ulster-Scot I am tight. Perhaps some of the boys, and ladies, in this Chamber will understand what that means. I do not like to buy things unnecessarily; that is a fact. If a mistake is made printing letterheads, the paper is turned over and used for other purposes. If envelopes have lost their stickiness, I put sellotape on them and make sure that they are used. It is a matter not simply of working to keep costs down, but of being a good steward. I believe that that is my job as an individual and one that we should be doing in the House.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) referred to plastic bags. I hail from Northern Ireland: we were the first country in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to introduce charges for plastic bags. We took the lead—we did the business, and everyone else followed. It is great to lead and have others follow; we enjoy doing that. The 5p per bag protocol was perhaps hard for some people to understand, yet as time has progressed there has been no more complaining, as people have got into the routine of putting bags in their cars. People adjust and get used to it; people do what has to be done.

The same goes for the introduction of recycling as a must for the local council. Black bins are collected in alternate weeks and recycling the other week. People have to think before they bin things, which, again, is the right way to do it. What are the results, from a local perspective? The local rates were kept down directly from money saved in landfill costs. Every year 8 child enjoyed a day seeing why we recycle and the difference that it makes. As has been said, it is a case of educating future generations to think differently from us. We as adults do not have the savvy that children have when it comes to litter and recycling, but we need to learn.

Has it been worth it thus far? The report that I read in a national newspaper, which indicated that the number of plastic bags found on the seabed has plummeted, suggests that it has. There have been some good things. It is all very well to be negative and critical, but at the end of the day we have to be positive as well. However, as is to be expected, plastic bags are not the only issue facing the marine environment. We are winning the war on plastic bags, and winning hearts and minds, but more has to be done.

As hon. Members have said, 8 million tonnes of plastic makes its way into oceans each year. Experts estimate that plastic is ingested by 31 species of marine mammal and more than 100 species of seabird. More than 9 billion fewer plastic bags have been used since the Government introduced the 5p charge. That is enough to wrap around the world more than 100 times. It is an outstanding reduction of 83%—good news—but we have to do more. The deep sea is now littered with plastic items, including bottles and fishing debris. The amount of plastic in the world's oceans is touted to treble within a decade. If that does not shock us and make us want to do something, I am not sure what will.

The annual beach survey by the Marine Conservation Society recorded a 10% rise in litter in 2017. September's "Great British Beach Clean" collected an average of 718 pieces of rubbish every 100 metres. There were 701 items per 100 metres in Northern Ireland—the second worst in the United Kingdom, so we have a lot to learn as well. It is good to highlight this matter, but it is equally important that we bring people along with us to understand exactly why steps are being taken and why we are asking people to remember to bring their reusable bottles and containers, and to stop using straws and so on.

Douglas Chapman: I get the impression that the public are a step ahead of the Government and legislation. They are already prepared mentally and attitudinally to make the change. I spoke to our friends from Plastic Free Dunfermline, a group in my constituency that tries to make our town plastic-free. They talked about not applying levies or negative instruments on people, but being positive by encouraging retailers to provide water in the town's shops, so that people can take a bottle and have it refilled at any point. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with such simple ideas?

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. If we have too many interventions, not everybody will get in.

Jim Shannon: So that more people can get in, Sir Edward, I will not take extra time. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I wholeheartedly support what he said.

Many people may knee-jerk react and resist, but we are not eco-warriors on the attack. We should be eco-educators coming alongside people, as that will be more successful. I look to the method of my local council with regard to those who persist in refusing to recycle: three strikes and your bin is not lifted. Then they know what they need to do. The gentle approach has meant that very few bins are not lifted, and people in the borough are coming to terms with recycling in a way that is not offensive but inclusive. That is the approach that the Government—I look to the Minister—should use. We have a duty of care to our environment, but also to help people understand. Our approach must reflect that.

3.12 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this important debate. I stand as the Member for Stirling, a landlocked constituency, but, as the right hon. Gentleman said, the issue captures the imagination of constituents and matters a great deal to them.

I wholeheartedly welcome the recent Government announcement of their intention to ban the sale of plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England. I also welcome the Scottish Government's consultation and proposal to ban the manufacture and sale of plastic-stemmed cotton buds in Scotland, and there are reports that the Scottish Government might also consider banning plastic straws at the end of 2019. I strongly urge Her Majesty's Government and the devolved Administrations to work together in the development of those policy instruments. The Welsh Government have already said—

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman, who was about to turn to the Welsh Government, for giving way. Does he agree that Wales has been leading the way in this area as the third best recycling nation? Furthermore, it is very ambitious with a recycling and zero-waste target by 2050. Of course there is more to do, but Wales is certainly leading the way.

Stephen Kerr: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. The Welsh Government are absolutely right to say that it is good for us to co-operate across these islands. Just because something is devolved does not mean that we should not work together to get the job done, and I hope that that is what will happen. I hope we will not see a divergence when there can be commonality and collaboration.

Recycling is a feasible solution, and stimulating the development of the market for recycled products is essential. In my constituency of Stirling, Graham's Dairy is working with its bottle supplier, Nampak—also based in Stirling—to develop milk bottles that use significantly less plastic, yet maintain the same rigidity and security for the milk that we all buy. It uses a significant amount of recycled material in its bottles and that pays dividends in costs and allows its product to be more sustainable into the long term.

The innovations by Nampak to create a milk bottle that uses significantly less plastic is worthy of note, as are attempts to make a plastic that will degrade safely

[Stephen Kerr]

over a shorter period. We should never underestimate the entrepreneurial spirit and inventiveness of British innovators and entrepreneurs, and we should do everything to encourage it.

There is a lot of talk about a deposit scheme, and I am very much behind that principle. Many of us in Scotland mourn the loss of the Barr deposit scheme. Returning your Irn-Bru bottle for money off your next purchase gave the bottles value and meant that consumers were rewarded for returning them and behaving in an environmentally appropriate way—so the cycle of Irn-Bru drinking would continue. This cyclical economy for waste, in which the packaging is returned and reused, is worth aspiring to.

There are lots of details to be worked out. Packaging is complex; the materials involved are sometimes not as simple as they appear to be and can be remarkably varied. Often the complexity of the materials makes recycling almost impossible and certainly makes sorting more difficult. The issue becomes about how to control what we create and what we demand as a society. How do we simplify and amalgamate our product packaging to ensure that it is simple enough to be disposed of? The issue becomes about how we treat the packaging as a part of the supply chain and how we as consumers behave. As the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) said, consumers are ahead of the wave in this respect.

I conclude with an apocryphal story from the constituency of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield). Last week, it was reported that a packet of Golden Wonder crisps from 1967 had been found on a beach in East Lothian. Neil McDonald found the 50-year-old wrapper while cleaning up a beach in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. STV News reported that it had apparently survived half a century beneath the dunes and may have been unearthed by heavy winds hitting the beach. The ready-salted packet of crisps had a promotion on it to enter a competition to win a Triumph estate car. That is how they were able to date the packet of crisps to 1967.

What Mr McDonald said is worth dwelling on in this debate. He was shocked when he discovered the age of the packet and how it had been preserved. He said:

"It was buried under the sand but I could see the corner edging out. I was very surprised, it's quite frightening how durable these plastics can be. It's a real indicator that we need to do more to control what goes into the ocean and on the coasts."

That is incredibly profound and I genuinely believe that by innovating around packaging, both design and material, we can create solutions to the marine plastic challenge, which can then be exported around the world, as has been mentioned by several hon. Members. By innovating to change habits and create new disposal techniques, we can lead the way on systems that can be adopted by the rest of the world.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. In an attempt get everybody in, the time limit will now be reduced to four minutes—with no more interventions, please.

3.18 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate, which is timely and extremely important and means a great deal to me personally. I am a lifelong conservationist. I am particularly interested in birds and marine life. I am a member of my local wildlife trust and, with particular relevance to this debate, a member of the Maritime Conservation Society and a diver. I am not only interested in the things we have been discussing today, but I can see with my own eyes the beauty of the oceans and have a real personal interest in ensuring that they are clean and fit for us and for future generations.

The interest in the oceans and our environment and in keeping them clean and pristine goes way beyond those who simply use them for recreation. The "Blue Planet" programme has of course been referred to. It is intrinsic in all of us that we have an affinity for the natural world, but particularly for the oceans. Perhaps we think of the Apollo photographs with the "blue marble" floating in space, that the oceans and our part in them are all wrapped up together and that they are intrinsic to our feeling for the natural world. Whatever the reason, it none the less matters hugely to us all.

My constituency, like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), is landlocked, but a great many rivers run through west Oxfordshire and of course flow to the sea. Water pollution and quality are big issues in my constituency; they matter a great deal to my constituents. The statistics bear that out: 12 million tonnes were discarded last year, 80% of which was lost on land, in rivers such as those that flow through west Oxfordshire, ending up in the sea. Only 57% was collected for recycling, although west Oxfordshire has a relatively high recycling rate—one of the highest in the country—but more must be done. We must put a stop to the problem. We must work to eradicate plastics in the oceans, for all our sakes in the years to come.

A lot has been done—I welcome everything that the Government have done. They have already taken great strides, particularly under the current Secretary of State, and things have become turbocharged: banning microbeads; the incredibly successful approach to single-use plastics introduced under the coalition Government; the bottle deposit that has been mentioned already, and which is extremely encouraging; and the ban on straws, cotton buds and stirrers.

However, there is more to do. We must do more on recycling, and the issue must be introduced to people's education. It is a question of personal choice: we have all had the battle between conscience and convenience, when we go to buy a coffee and wish that we did not have to use a disposable cup, or water and we wish we did not have to use the plastic bottle—but we do. That is why the Sky Ocean Rescue campaign was so significant. We can all get into the habit of using those water canisters every time we go to buy a bottle. The Government are consulting, in the 25-year environment plan, on free water fountains so that wherever people are they can fill a canister for free, without having to buy water and, as a by-product, the plastic they do not want.

In addition, we must simply reduce the amount of packaging that we use. I commend Iceland for its attitude to reducing its plastic use. I echo all that has been said

about working with industry. Producers have a role, and there are excellent innovators looking at ways to find better plastics, or to reduce or reuse plastic—perhaps using biodegradable materials when plastics are unavoidable.

The UK is leading the world. The Government have taken necessary and brave steps and the 25-year environment plan is a big part of what they are doing. We are on the right track, but the oceans are our shared heritage. Their health is our responsibility, and we must get things right.

3.22 pm

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate.

The marine environment stretches way beyond our 200-mile territorial waters, but that does not reduce the UK's responsibilities. However, it is staggering to discover that, as other hon. Members have mentioned, 90% of plastic pollution in the seas comes from 10 major rivers, eight of which are in Asia, the others being the Nile and the Niger in Africa. As my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) has said, the Yangtze is a major producer, but the Ganges produces an estimated 900,000 tonnes. That is why I welcomed the announcement by the Secretary of State for International Development of her Department's commitment to support research and carry out waste management pilot programmes. We should also consider conditional aid. On so many fronts, it is great news: livelihoods and health will be protected, the oceans will be cleaned up and jobs will be provided for some of the world's poorest people.

Reducing plastic loads by 50% in the rivers ranked in the top 10 would reduce the total river-based load going to the sea by 45%, according to research by Christian Schmidt. There is an estimated 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic in the world. What is at issue is not the propensities of plastic, but what we do with it. If 10 rivers are largely responsible for getting discarded plastic to the ocean, it is obvious, if we follow the 80/20 rule, what our priority should be. The US and Europe are not mismanaging their collected waste; the plastic in developing world rivers is due to littering, industrial and building waste, and poor waste collection. We in the west should, of course, reduce plastic use and lead the way on recycling, but China alone is estimated to cause 2.4 million tonnes of plastic waste. That is 28% of the world total. The US, the biggest consumer country on the planet, produces 77,000 tonnes, or 1% of the total.

Many of those taking part in the debate will reasonably ask Ministers why we are not moving faster in the matters of plastic bottles and coffee cups, and why the 25-year plan is not more ambitious. I am conscious of the time and will cut my speech short, but I shall end with something that the Environment Secretary said recently:

“When it comes to our seas and oceans, the challenge is global so the answer must be too.”

3.25 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is, as ever, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. In passing, I wonder whether the Triumph car lasted as long as the crisp bag with the promotion for it. I suspect not.

I welcome the debate, at a time when the Government are already being proactive in addressing public concern about plastic waste and, in particular, its impact on the marine environment. The subject is close to my heart, as for 10 years as a local councillor in Ayr I undertook a weekly litter pick—land-based, not sea-based. My thanks go to Cathy, Mary, Ross, Betty and David, and many others who were a great help over that decade. I also thank the local Rotary clubs for their annual contribution to a beach clean that lifts tonnes of litter from the lovely beaches around Ayrshire. However, as has been said, that approach, though welcome, is not the answer.

Discarded plastic places the natural balance of the marine ecosystem at risk, including the lives of many marine species. Off the coast of my constituency is Ailsa Craig, an attraction for tourists and ornithologists. Among the birds that nest on the island are a colony of puffins which were recently reintroduced. It would be shameful if discarded plastic caused a decline in their numbers or indeed the numbers of any other coastal seabirds. I am advised by Plymouth Marine Laboratory that the six commonest seaborne litter items are on the increase year after year. The majority, but not all, come off the land: they are small plastic items, plastic food packaging, wet wipes, which have been mentioned, polystyrene foam, balloons and, not surprisingly, nylon fishing nets. Up to 80% of seaborne plastic has been discarded on land, having found its way into the sea via rivers and estuaries, but at some point it must have been discarded by our fellow human beings in a range and variety of countries throughout the world.

The ban on the manufacture of plastic microbeads in rinse-off cosmetics and personal care products came into force in January 2018, with a ban on their sale to follow. That step forward by the Government is surely welcome. On 18 April 2018 the Government announced their intention to ban the sale of plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England. I also commend the Scottish Government. They are consulting on banning plastic-stemmed cotton buds and will have set a determined target to end the use of plastic straws by 2019. The use of single-use carrier bags has fallen by 83% since 2015, which is, again, to be welcomed.

I recently visited a holiday park—Turnberry, near Girvan. Those who run it have, of their own volition, taken it upon themselves to end the use of plastic straws, plastic stirrers and single-use cups. I commend that organisation and any other that has taken up the cudgels to improve the environment. I welcome the Government's consideration of several initiatives, such as bottle return deposit schemes, bottle refill points and a levy on single-use coffee cups. Amn't I pleased that I do not drink coffee! I am a tea drinker—perhaps it will apply to tea as well. They are also considering an extension of the 5p charge for single-use carrier bags.

It is important that all nations throughout the world work together with manufacturers and retailers to reduce dependency on plastics. My thanks go to those companies, such as Iceland, that have indicated support for ending the use of single-use plastic. The Government's 25-year environment plan is to be commended. One could call it ambitious, and it is the right thing to do, but I think it could be more ambitious, and it could be accelerated, because there is an appetite among the British public to end the catastrophe happening in the oceans.

[Bill Grant]

The Government can exert better influence. We need, as I have said, to work with other nations throughout the world. With a bit of effort we can end this disaster.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I call Damien Moore. You have three minutes.

3.29 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant). I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing this debate on one of the most pressing environmental issues of our age. I represent the seaside constituency of Southport, which has a long-standing maritime culture, and like all those who have seen the scale of this issue at first hand, I know that it can be solved only by co-ordinated international action.

Just as coal dust in our cities was the unfortunate by-product of the first industrial revolution, plastic in our oceans and maritime environments has become the by-product of the second. It is essential that our Government—indeed, every national Government—act now. I am delighted that DEFRA now has at its helm the most prominent Secretary of State for that Department for a generation, and under his stewardship I am sure that these often under-reported issues will be given the attention they deserve.

It is terrifying that 8 million tonnes of plastic are released into the ocean each year, and with the emergence of the new tiger economies, that number is sadly set to rise. Much of the plastic that finds its way into oceans ends up in one of the main ocean gyres, where it spins around in giant whirlpools, devastating marine life, and is almost impossible to remove. The plastic that does not fall into a gyre invariably floats around the sea until it washes up on land, damaging the local ecology, disrupting tourism and presenting health hazards.

The results of the great British beach clean undertaken by the Marine Conservation Society show that litter on our beaches is up by 10%, with a staggering 718 pieces of predominately plastic rubbish found in every 100-metre area cleaned. Southport's beach is famously big and stretches out to the horizon. If we apply that statistic to the town's beach, I dread to think how many pieces of plastic and other detritus are covering it at this very moment. Whether or not they consider themselves to be environmentally conscientious, I am sure that all Members present will share my sadness about that fact.

I am a great believer in the 25-year environmental plan, and a UK with absolutely no plastic waste is an achievable goal, despite the amount of plastic debris discarded every day. A quarter of a century is a long time, and I would be interested to know whether there have been any discussions about reducing that time frame. My constituents in Southport are weary of the damage that discarded plastic has done to the town, the beach and tourism, and they are keen for improvement over the next few years, rather than the next few decades. As we leave the EU, we have the chance to be a world leader in environmental standards, and ridding ourselves of plastic waste is the first step. Be it bottles, bags or

microbeads, plastic has destroyed our oceans, killed our marine life and ravaged our maritime environments for too long. It is my hope that we are now on the cusp of serious change.

3.32 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate. He made some good points about plastic waste, which is now a fashionable topic. The Government are now at a privileged moment in time in which to take further action on the pollution of our environment, and I hope they take that opportunity.

Members have demonstrated the will to work across the devolved Parliaments. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) made superb points about market failure. He reiterated that there is confusion regarding the disposal of a vast amount of products in our shops. Reducing VAT on such products would be a superb nudge to everyone involved in making and disposing of them.

I thank all previous speakers for their views on this highly important issue. I am delighted to take part in a debate on a topic about which I feel strongly, namely the scourge of plastic pollution on the environment. The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) mentioned Barr's Irn-Bru deposit scheme. How far-sighted of that company, which started in the Falkirk area—[*Interruption.*] I thought you would like that, Stephen.

While watching the magnificent “Blue Planet”, I was struck by how much we have to thank David Attenborough for ending his TV series with the theme of protecting our marine life. It is a subject close to my heart, and I know the public feel strongly about it, too. Many of my constituents have contacted me about it, and in my work with the Environmental Audit Committee the fight to halt the pollution of our seas by plastic waste goes on.

Scotland has been praised for leading the way in this battle. Nurdle hunt events on beaches in my constituency and East Lothian have allowed people to see how many tiny pieces of plastic litter our rock pools and sand. Because of that, and other awareness-raising events around the country, people have increasingly added their support to combating that creeping threat to waterways. We welcomed the successful UK ban on microbeads, which is a positive move in the ongoing war against pollution. However, the ban covers only products that are designed to go down the drain, which does not even include cosmetics, never mind consumer products. More must be done.

As you know, Sir Edward, many individuals and companies are undertaking good initiatives. For example, on Sunday 29 April I was invited to attend the 100th anniversary of the Falkirk and District Boys Brigade service at Larbert Old church. The Very Rev. Dr John Chalmers, who was a former moderator, spoke and his message was very clear. His speech was captivating. It was about where our planet came from, how it began, and he spoke about “great radiance”, and how we must look after this planet. Those words were not lost on anyone attending the service, especially the young people present. They get the message, and so should decision makers in this place.

Scotland's decision to charge 5p for a plastic bag was taken up across the UK—I might have a disagreement here with my friend from Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—and that was another good move for the environment. Sadly, after Brexit we have no guarantees from the UK Government that Scotland will still be in charge of its own laws for protecting our clean water and land. We must keep pressing for answers, and we will.

On my visits to local supermarket giants Asda and Tesco, it was encouraging to see their work to reduce plastic in their products and packaging. Ordinary items such as cotton buds cause real problems for marine life. Through time, they are gradually broken down into small plastic fragments that are scattered through our waterways. That is a massive problem, and we must all do our bit to help reduce it. The Co-op ceased using microbeads in its products in the '90s, as did Falkirk's Scottish Fine Soaps Company.

There is more good news, and creative thinking, in a scheme that involves authors and illustrators, including Quentin Blake and Robert Macfarlane, from the publisher Penguin Random House. That new campaign centres on reducing the use of plastics in the book industry. Authors4Oceans asks publishers, book shops and readers to reduce the amount of plastic they use by finding eco alternatives to the bags, straws, bottles and single-use cutlery that ends up at the bottom of the sea. Even its jiffy bags are going to be plastic free.

The alliance between big business and the public is what gets things done and brings about change. The rising tide of plastic waste in the ocean has been described by the UN oceans chief as a "planetary crisis". How can we disagree with that? There is increasing public appetite for urgent action. It is a horrific fact that in some parts of the sea there is now more plastic by weight than plankton, and that impacts on the environment, wildlife and people. The quantity of plastic in our oceans grows by about 8 million tonnes per year, and plastic production is set to double.

DEFRA's marine litter monitoring, which measures the number of items found on the sea floor, found an increase of 150% last year. Meanwhile, the UK approach to this crisis remains rather inward-looking. Let us get away from this silo-thinking. Unlike Scotland and Northern Ireland, the UK seems to lack a clear plan. Although the UK marine strategy acknowledges plastic as a problem in the context of marine litter and as a danger to wildlife, the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into plastic bottles criticised it for its weak analysis. The EAC identified the need for more research, and outlined a basic environmental monitoring programme. Actual measures were sparse—surely the precautionary principle would suggest that we act as well as research the problem. The only monitoring of floating plastics under the marine strategy is a DEFRA initiative to measure the prevalence of plastic items in the stomachs of dead seabirds, especially fulmars, that members of the public have found washed up on the beach. A fulmar is roughly the size of a small chicken, and it only eats plastic that looks like fish eggs—I have here some nurdles; these are what kill the birds—so that plan will not detect items such as floating water bottles.

Marine issues are transnational, and the EU's integrated maritime policy provides the framework through which the UK and its neighbours strategise and legislate for

the future of their seas. What will happen to that co-operation post-Brexit? Amid the uncertainty, we have an onslaught of words and announcements, including consultations on charges for single-use plastics and a deposit return scheme for England. As hon. Members know, the Scottish Government have already committed to such a scheme. Local authorities in England and Wales can issue on-the-spot fines for litter louts, but what about fly-tippers who refuse to pay up?

The Government's Waste and Resources Action Programme has signed up major retailers and manufacturers to its plastics pact and promises a "resource revolution". That is good, but it does not go far enough, because there is no enforcement mechanism. The UK Government are taking a soft approach by refusing to implement practical solutions recommended by the EAC such as the 25p latte levy, and instead they seek voluntary agreements with coffee chains.

The UK Government have sought only voluntary agreements for manufacturers and retailers to reduce plastic packaging. Like the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), I would like to use the nudge principle and colour code all plastic bottles and coffee cups in green, amber and red, to make it simple, so that when people have the thing in front of them, they can put it into the appropriate coloured bin. For example, action on microbeads was limited to a narrow class of products, against the advice of the EAC. There is too much reliance on citizen participation, though it is great to clean up litter and collect research data. Austerity is forcing local authorities to cut essential services that are needed to help them meet litter-related targets.

Over the years, I have felt that my concerns with environmental issues have often fallen on deaf ears. I do not feel that any more. I think the public are behind us and we are finally realising that there is no such thing as throwing something away on our poor, choked planet. I will conclude by saying that if you want to change the world, you get busy in your own little corner. The EAC has already done that and it has served this Parliament well.

3.40 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing this important debate. Like other hon. Members, on both sides, he articulated incredibly well how taking action on plastic waste will require a variety of approaches, not simply legislation.

Like the constituencies of the hon. Members for Witney (Robert Courts) and for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), Halifax could not be any more landlocked, but this is still an issue that many of my constituents feel strongly about. This debate is timely. Although the Government have made some bold announcements about their policies on plastic waste, like other hon. Members I am keen to ensure that the talk is backed up with decisive and urgent action.

Like the hon. Members for North Wiltshire (James Gray) and for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), the shadow DEFRA team has also sought to engage with the House authorities on the prevalence of single-use plastics across the parliamentary estate. We, too, have

[Holly Lynch]

found that engagement challenging. We are keen to pursue it and make some progress. I join my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) in saying that so often it is children and young people who, on occasion, get a bad reputation for engaging in litter and plastic waste, but often they are among the most concerned about the issue, and are involved in some of the most positive examples we have seen in clean-ups and taking action, which is delivering a benefit to coastal communities.

I am pleased to see the Minister in her place and I am hopeful that she will provide a positive response to many of the issues raised in the contributions, which I thought were outstanding. We heard in shocking detail about the true scale of the plastic waste crisis. Greenpeace estimates that 12.7 million tonnes of plastic end up in our oceans every year—equivalent to a truck-load of rubbish every minute. The waste includes everything we might expect from our throw-away society, from plastic bottles and bags to fruit stickers and disposable razors. We are becoming increasingly aware of the impact this can have on our sea life, with large plastic pieces poisoning whales or entangling turtles and smaller pieces entering the ocean food chain as they are eaten by smaller fish.

Like the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and the hon. Members for Richmond Park and for Falkirk (John Mc Nally), I pay tribute to the BBC's "Blue Planet II" series, which inspired both wonder at the beauty of the world's oceans, and horror at the way they are being desecrated. The BBC's natural history unit and David Attenborough deserve huge credit for highlighting exactly why our marine environment must be protected. Since the series was broadcast, it has been heartening to see the war on plastics go from something of a fringe issue to dominating the mainstream political agenda. People across the country are switching to reusable bags, bottles and coffee cups, and retailers are being challenged on social media for examples of excessive and wasteful packaging in their stores. It is good to hear that many events such as this year's tennis championships at Wimbledon are going straw-free, after handing out 400,000 last year.

The Government have taken steps in the right direction. We are happy to support those initiatives, which play a role in reducing the plastic waste entering our oceans. We have supported the microbeads ban and have continually called for action on straws and a plastic bottle deposit return scheme. We welcome the approach of addressing plastic waste not simply as a national problem, but as an international problem that requires international co-operation—a point made by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight). However, we are keen, where appropriate, to push the Government to go faster and be bolder wherever possible across this policy area.

Labour has a keen record of protecting our marine environment. I must mention that one of the proudest achievements of the previous Labour Government was the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. This created a system for improving the management and protection of coastal ecosystems. It is in this tradition that the shadow DEFRA team has been working on a number of campaigns to tackle plastic waste and protect our sea life.

The Minister and I share a passion to see plastic straws become a thing of the past. Last year, I wrote to the top 20 bar and restaurant chains in the country, urging them to adopt a "straws on request only" policy and asking them to stock biodegradable straws only for those who do require them. The response was positive and several major chains responded with a commitment to remove straws from their businesses. Upon realising that plastics have crept into tea bags, Labour's DEFRA team sent letters to the top tea bag producers, urging them to consider plastic-free alternatives. Responses are coming back from these firms and it has been reassuring to see the appetite for action on this specific product, which is just one of so many products that we will need to consider redesigning.

We recognise that the priority for marine pollution at present is stopping plastics getting into the oceans. This will of course require changing consumer behaviour and business practice, as well as improved product design. It will also require Government leadership to encourage recycling and incentivise making single-use plastics unavailable. Yet our concerns about this Government stem from the fact that they have failed to bring forward a single piece of primary legislation on any of their announcements on the environment since the last election. The deposit return scheme for plastic bottles really highlights how the Government's environmental policy is quick to get the headlines, but much slower to take action in reality. The Secretary of State has now confirmed that a consultation on the specifics of a deposit return scheme will have to wait until the conclusion of the ongoing single-use plastic tax consultation by the Treasury.

The Minister will already be aware that, as a country, we use 13 billion plastic drinks bottles every year, but more than 3 billion are still not recycled. Why is it taking Government so long to introduce a deposit return scheme, when 700,000 plastic bottles are littered every day? We are told to expect a date of 2020, but with so much uncertainty at present and timelines sliding across a range of DEFRA policy areas, when will we see a commitment that a deposit return scheme will be introduced?

It is a similar story with coffee cups. Some 99.75% of disposable coffee cups used in Britain are not recycled. In 2011, it was estimated that we threw away 2.5 billion coffee cups a year in the UK, and the figure will have inevitably increased since then. A poll for *The Independent* found that 54% of the public support a latte levy of 25% on all drinks sold in disposable cups. Businesses are taking the lead, as we have heard, with Starbucks trialling a 5p surcharge at 35 locations across London, and Pret a Manger, Costa Coffee and Greggs all offering discounts for bringing a reusable cup. The Secretary of State seemed to be taking serious action on the issue. As hon. Members may remember, in January he highlighted the issue by handing out reusable coffee cups to all members of the Cabinet. Yet once again, after a few good headlines, the action failed to materialise when the Government rejected the latte levy in March. I would be grateful if the Minister outlined what steps, if any, the Government are planning to take to tackle the problem of disposable coffee cups.

To add to this inaction in preventing plastic waste, we are also concerned about the Government's approach to recycling the waste that is already produced. Progress on

recycling must be driven through a comprehensive framework. Hon. Members will be aware that the EU has brought forward a target of 2030 for phasing out single-use plastics. Compare those ambitious targets with the Government's 25-year environment plan. While the EU is outlining exactly where targets need to be met, the Government's plan states that they will be developing ambitious new future targets and milestones, but that it will take 25 years to tackle single-use plastics. I am glad that the Government have now agreed to support the EU targets. However, it is concerning that, as we leave the EU, we stand to lag behind our neighbours on this issue.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention that cuts to local authorities have impacted on their ability to collect waste in a timely and efficient manner, as we have heard. An increasing number of councils are opting for collections every three weeks, with many introducing increased charges for bulky waste or garden waste collections. Although some of the Government's work in this area is certainly welcomed, we would all like to see efforts go much further.

There is undoubtedly an international element to this work, as we have heard. I hope that the Minister can explain why, despite the profile given to the issue of marine pollution and plastics at the recent Commonwealth summit, only four Commonwealth countries joined the Government's clean oceans alliance.

To conclude, we look to the Minister to allay our fears and show that the Government are about actions as well as headlines. I hope that she will commit to taking the boldest steps to combat the consumption and littering of single-use plastics, which do so much harm to our cherished marine environments.

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate. I am pleased to inform the House of our progress in addressing the global issue of plastic pollution in the maritime environment. The hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) talked passionately about wanting to introduce biodegradable straws, and I am pleased that we will be able to do that in due course. We must be able to prevent and tackle waste wherever it appears, which is why it is important to work on a domestic and a global scale. We work with multilateral organisations, such as the G7, which is developing a plastics charter, and the UN on the clean seas initiative. Through the International Maritime Organisation, we collectively oversee the international convention for the prevention of pollution from ships, which is of similar importance.

At the Commonwealth summit two weeks ago, the Prime Minister outlined her key priorities for oceans. The 53 nations set out a Commonwealth blue charter, which highlighted the key things for tackling issues affecting the blue sea. It was important that we could work together to find an interest in how to develop the responses to some of those challenges, particularly those that focus on improvements to oceans and plastics.

During the Commonwealth meeting, we announced with Vanuatu that we had set up an agreement in which Commonwealth member states will join forces in the

fight against plastic pollution by pledging action and enterprising approaches, such as the global ghost gear initiative, which seeks to encourage the greater removal of one of the most dangerous forms of marine litter. Seven countries have come forward so far in support of the alliance: New Zealand, Australia, Kenya, Ghana, St Lucia, Fiji and Sri Lanka. Engaging companies and non-governmental organisations will be essential to meet the challenge of plastic pollution.

The Commonwealth clean oceans alliance will work in partnership with the World Economic Forum, Sky, Waitrose, Coca-Cola, Fauna and Flora International and the World Wide Fund for Nature to share expertise and experience and push for global change. The Prime Minister also announced £61.4 million in funding to boost global research and to help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste entering the oceans.

Our deposit return scheme has been highlighted. It is key that we want to boost recycling rates and reduce littering of those bottles. As has been said, it will be subject to consultation later this year. One of the challenges of the DRS is that in this country we use more plastic material in the on-the-go environment than any other country around the world. It will take some time for us to come up with the context to put forward because we have to recognise that the process that individuals use, and the way the scheme is processed, is quite different in Norway, Sweden and Germany, which I went to see. We need to consider how we can bring the scheme in line with transport activities. On-the-go activity needs to be considered to ensure that, instead of people throwing plastics away to be disbanded or having always to take them back to their homes or to a particular supermarket, there are potentially ways open to submit them at a rail station or something similar nearby.

We have already committed to reforming our producer responsibility schemes to better incentivise producers to be more resource efficient. We are already talking to industry and other groups about how we might reform the packaging waste regulations to encourage businesses to design their packaging products in a more sustainable way, to encourage the greater use of recycled material in those products, and to stimulate the increase of collection, reprocessing and recycling of packaging waste. As part of the upcoming resources and waste strategy, we will set out options for the kind of packaging waste producer responsibility system that we think will work best to deliver our ambitions.

Earlier this year we announced our world-leading ban on microbeads in rinse-off personal care products, which will finally come into force before the end of next month. Furthermore, we have announced that, subject to a consultation later this year, we will remove the sale of plastic straws, plastic drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England. We will consider, however, that straws may be required by some consumers who suffer from disabilities and other medical conditions. As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland highlighted, Scotland has also announced a consultation on those matters. We are keen to continue to work with the devolved Administrations so that we share ambitions to take things forward. We will recognise that as we take steps forward.

Our plastic bag charge has been in place since 2015. To give credit to the other nations, England was the last to introduce it. We have had huge success since then,

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

with more than 9 billion bags being taken out of circulation. We have announced that we will take further action on all plastic bags, and in the short term, newsagents have started to take proactive action. Recent research by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science showed a decrease in the amount of plastic bags found on the UK's seabed.

We will continue to look at ways to reduce plastic waste. Improving and encouraging the removal of high-harm material such as ghost gear should be encouraged. In his spring statement, the Chancellor launched a call for evidence to seek views on how the tax system or charges could reduce waste from single-use plastics. We need to get better at understanding potential forms, sources and types of impact of different types of marine litter. The Marine Management Organisation is looking at evidence in English seas for that. To improve understanding about the origin of litter and its potential extraction, we are working through the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation to improve capability to mark fishing gear, which supports our guidance in UK waters. Ropes, lines and pots are marine litter of the highest harm type. To reduce that threat, the UK co-leads an action group with Sweden within the OSPAR convention to develop and promote best practice for the fishing industry and competent authorities.

The Government cannot do it alone. We support initiatives such as Fishing for Litter, the beach cleans run by the Marine Conservation Society and Surfers Against Sewage, and the other work that people do every day to clean up our seas and look for new ways to reuse and recycle what is recovered. We are pleased that Morrisons has recently announced that it will sign the global ghost gear initiative. We are delighted to be supporting the ground-breaking UK plastics pact that

was announced last week, which brings together more than 40 companies, NGOs and the Government with the aim of creating a circular economy to tackle plastic waste.

I hope that I have provided the House with a satisfactory outline of what we are doing to reduce plastic waste in the marine environment. We will continue to work with other countries, NGOs, industry and experts from across the board to go further.

Holly Lynch: Before she finishes, will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I will.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I hope Alistair Carmichael will have 30 seconds at the end.

Holly Lynch: I appreciate that the Minister is not feeling very well this afternoon, and I commend her for persevering none the less.

Dr Coffey: Thank you.

3.59 pm

Mr Carmichael: I thank the Minister for her attendance and engagement with us. It is apparent from the debate that there is broad agreement across the House. We accept that the Government have done a lot in this regard, but we look to them to do more. The more they do, and the faster they do it, the more support they will get across the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Government policy on reducing plastic waste in the marine environment.

Ticket Touting: Musical Events

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered ticket touting and musical events.

Thank you very much, Sir Christopher, for calling me to speak. It is really good to renew our acquaintance after all the years we spent together on the Scottish Affairs Committee, and I congratulate you on your recent knighthood. I also refer people to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

It should be the easiest thing in the world: simply buying a ticket to go and see a rock concert—I have you down, Sir Christopher, as a grime fan. When you try to secure your Stormzy ticket, it should be straightforward, but swimming through shark-infested waters would probably be an easier and safer thing to do than trying to buy a ticket for a popular musical show.

From the first click of the mouse in their quest to secure a ticket, customers are exposed to any number of touts, profiteers and spivs, who are determined to exploit them and maximise their own return at the customer's expense. Customers will come into contact with an out-of-control, all-consuming, rip-off machine, which operates from the artist's management and promoter all the way down to the venue and ticketing agency, and then all the way down to the tout and the unsuspecting fan. It is a business model designed to maximise profits and exploit its consumer base, and it has become one of the biggest consumer crises that we face in this country today. Quite simply, our ticketing infrastructure is irredeemably broken and beyond repair.

Let us have a cursory look at how this system has been created and designed. Touting has always gone on; it was probably going on in the Colosseum in the Roman empire. As a young lad trying to secure my Clash tickets, I certainly saw touts outside the venues, selling tickets for a few pounds extra. So touting has always happened, but the way it is designed just now is almost on an industrial scale, and it is riddled with all sorts of pernicious arrangements and invidious relationships.

The situation was probably defined in 2010, when the largest live music promoter in the world, Live Nation, bought the largest ticket agency in the world, Ticketmaster, creating something close to a monopoly on the live music scene. In addition, Ticketmaster just so happens to own two out of "the big four" secondary sites, Get Me In! and Seatwave; the touts like to do most of their business on those four sites.

What has been created, therefore, is a vertically integrated model that works in almost perfect partnership and symbiosis, whereby everybody gets their cut and their share. I will try to describe it as best I can. Live Nation, which is the largest music promoter in the world, ensures that venues employ Ticketmaster to sell the tickets for the artists that it represents. Tickets then go on sale, but they are hoovered up on an industrial scale by the touts and the scalpers. They are then put up for sale by the touts on the secondary sites owned by Ticketmaster, at hugely inflated prices.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): My hon. Friend will be aware that I have a long-standing interest in this issue. Does he agree that the measures announced by the UK Government to outlaw the so-called ticket-bots cannot come soon enough and have been too long in the waiting?

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, and she is absolutely and utterly right. Last week, I listened to the presentation by the Competition and Markets Authority at the meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on ticket abuse, which was hosted by the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). These measures have been far too slow in coming; the Government need to get a move on with them. I will come back to that point later, because what the Government are doing is important, but there is lethargy at the heart of their response.

I was trying to describe how all this works. We have Live Nation putting on the shows and Ticketmaster selling the tickets at the venues, which are all hoovered up by the touts. The tickets then go on sale on the secondary sites owned by Ticketmaster. Google is then incentivised to promote those secondary sites by placing them at the top of their searches. So what happens in this perfect model is that the touts get their hit on the secondary sites and Google gets a share, but critically Ticketmaster and Live Nation secure their secondary cut from their secondary sites.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. We have had numerous debates on this issue over the years, but this one is extremely timely, with the "bot law" coming in just last week, and following the meeting that we had with the CMA. He mentioned Google. Does he agree that most people are driven to these sites by Google? If he does, does he also agree that Google has a role to play—by not giving these sites top billing and by ensuring that consumers realise that these markets are secondary markets and not primary ones?

Pete Wishart: Absolutely, and what Google actually does is breach its own certification rules, which suggest that it must ensure that such sites are designated as secondary sites. Google has a big role to play in this, and the hon. Lady is absolutely right to mention it.

This business model is almost elegant in its exploitative design. Last year, Live Nation made over £1 billion just from its secondary sites. There is also good anecdotal evidence, which I will try to relay under parliamentary privilege, suggesting that the players at the very top of the music business tree—at management level and at promoter level—have a working relationship with some of the biggest touts in the world, to ensure that the wheels and the cogs of this huge, exploitative machine are properly oiled and working at maximum efficiency.

Everywhere throughout this broken infrastructure, relationships and models of exploitation such as those I have mentioned are the norm. StubHub is another one of the "big four" secondary sites. It is owned by eBay, which purchased it in 2007. StubHub now has a global partnership with AEG, which just so happens to operate the O2 and Wembley Arena. That means that, by default, the parasite-infested StubHub is the

[Pete Wishart]

official resale partner of the O2 and Wembley Arena, which are two of the most prestigious venues in the United Kingdom.

However, the daddy of them all is the truly appalling and exploitative Viagogo. I do not know what arrangement Viagogo has with Google, but if you were to look online for your Stormzy ticket, Sir Christopher, you would be directed to Viagogo to try and purchase it.

Our ticketing infrastructure, therefore, is a broken monolith of misery, where tech giants are in cahoots with touts, who are in cahoots with the promoters and managers. But I will spend just a couple of minutes on Viagogo. How a company that exists exclusively to exploit people and to rip them off is allowed to continue operating is simply beyond me. If anybody is watching this debate at home, I say to them, “Do not buy tickets from Viagogo! Go nowhere near them! You will be ripped off totally! Do not touch them!”

At the all-party group meeting last week, I listened to some of the unfortunate victims of Viagogo. Viagogo is so exploitative that a self-help group has emerged among its customers—that group has thousands and thousands of members, who are ordinary, honest people just trying to secure a ticket for a friend or a grandchild, or as a rare treat for themselves. They had no reason to believe that the simple fact of trying to buy a ticket would expose them to such shark-infested waters and such danger. Why would they? Here was “nice Mr Google” directing them to these sites, so that they could find tickets. But that is where the horror starts, as the victims of Viagogo are exposed to all sorts of hard sells, tricks and exploitative practices.

Mrs Hodgson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I will give way one last time to the hon. Lady.

Mrs Hodgson: I am intervening because I want the hon. Gentleman to join me in congratulating Claire Turnham for her amazing work. She set up Victims of Viagogo, originally because she was a victim herself and wanted to try to get her money back. After that long fight, however, she put out the information she had gathered, in order to help others. She has now helped thousands of people to receive hundreds of thousands of pounds in refunds. So will he join me in welcoming Claire’s work?

Pete Wishart: I have no hesitation in doing so, and I also commend the hon. Lady herself for her diligent work over the years in chairing the all-party parliamentary group on ticket abuse. In fact, it is in my speech to congratulate Claire Turnham, whom I met last week and who has done a fantastic job. She has managed to reclaim thousands and thousands of pounds for the Victims of Viagogo, but why should she have to do that? It is not the job of individuals—drummers, guitarists and singers—to protect the public; it is the Minister’s job. That is your job, Minister. It should be you who is protecting people—not individuals such as Claire Turnham, who are having to do that difficult job.

I heard about the emotional impact of being ripped off and realised how stressful and difficult it is for people to try to reclaim the money they have been

swindled out of. I heard that health, relationships and work have all seriously suffered. As a musician, I heard about people being put off attending gigs for the rest of their lives because of the experience they have suffered from these parasites and companies that exist solely to rip people off.

Patricia Gibson: My hon. Friend has been very generous with his time. He talks about the vast number of people who are exploited by these big businesses moving in and hoovering up tickets. Does he agree that it looks like the only way to stop this practice is to legally cap the price of resale tickets?

Pete Wishart: I have got an even better and more elegant solution than my hon. Friend’s, and I beg her to be patient; I will get to it. The issue has to be tackled properly. There is no point mucking around, doing things tentatively. We have to grab the bull by the horns. If she gives me a few minutes, I will get to that point.

I want to explain my renewed interest in the matter, Sir Christopher, because I know you will be absolutely fascinated. My former band, Runrig, put tickets on sale for their last ever concert, which will be at Stirling castle later this year. As the last ever concert, it was obviously going to be popular. There was no way that supply would ever satisfy demand, so it was going to be a target for the touts. Within minutes of tickets going on sale, I was inundated with Runrig fans angry, frustrated and disappointed with the experience of trying to secure a ticket. I was provided with screengrabs of tickets available on the secondary site, Get Me In!, at four times the face value of the tickets that the secondary site owner, the official agent Ticketmaster, had just put on sale 12 minutes earlier.

Runrig did everything possible to spare their fans from the touts, but it is almost impossible to evade their parasitic reach. Since then, I have watched through disbelieving eyes the misery extended to other live music events scheduled to take place this summer. Probably the biggest ticket of the year will be the Rolling Stones. They are playing at Murrayfield in Edinburgh. It will be a really popular show, and it is another huge opportunity for the touts. I saw tickets on sale for 480% above face value, even though face-value tickets were still available. People were directed through Google to the sites and encouraged to buy from them.

I pay credit to the Rolling Stones and the *Daily Record*, which has been absolutely fantastic—particularly the journalist Mark McGivern, who has pursued this matter resolutely. The *Daily Record* reported that the Stones were offered a cash incentive to put their tickets on sale to an agency that has pretty invidious relationships with secondary sites. It is to their immense credit that Sir Mick Jagger and Keith Richards turned that down, but does that not demonstrate how far up the chain the issue reaches that such matters are discussed in band meetings? It shows the callous disregard for music fans from those at the very top of the music business. Given Government inaction, it has been left to the artists and musicians to try to develop solutions to protect their fans. It should not be the job of singers, musicians and guitarists to protect ordinary people from consumer affairs issues. That is the Government’s job. Ministers should be doing that.

Bands have attempted to put all sorts of tough terms and conditions on their tickets to try to keep them out of the secondary market, and artists are looking at ever more innovative solutions to protect their fans. I pay tribute to artists including Adele, Ed Sheeran, Noel Gallagher, Bastille and in particular the Arctic Monkeys, who have deployed a number of anti-touting strategies, but we need Government to take the lead.

I do not know which hon. Member or hon. Friend suggested banning bots, but the Government are starting to do something. They are in the process of banning those anonymous bots that Hoover up tickets, and they are now starting to ensure that recalcitrant secondary companies comply with existing law. At last the CMA has given notice to Seatwave, Get Me In! and StubHub, but they have been given nine months to comply. The biggest culprit of them all, Viagogo, has not even responded to the Government, but they still allow it to do business. We have had the Waterson report and the Consumer Rights Act 2015, but that is regularly broken and ignored. It has failed to protect people and it is tentatively enforced. Much stronger action is required.

In response to my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), I question the need for a secondary market at all. Why is there one? If someone cannot go to a concert they have a ticket for, they should give it back to the venue, which can then resell it to someone who can go. What is wrong with a simple arrangement such as that?

We usually hear from people—we have seen it in a couple of articles—that this is all about tickets finding their natural value, as if there is a sort of stock market where tickets find their real value at the hands of the touts reselling them. What utter tosh and rubbish! Since I secured this debate, I have even had touts getting in touch with me who say that they are some sort of misunderstood public servants. They have even set up their own self-help group called the Fair Ticketing Alliance. Someone will have to patiently explain to me how snapping up hundreds of tickets, then selling them back at twice, three or four times the price is really in the consumer interest. That is the thing about the touts: they will never stop, and they will always remain one step ahead of any measures to deal with them.

Touting is a hugely profitable business that will not be given up lightly, but it is what it is doing to live music that concerns me most. It is now threatening the whole music industry. The anti-tout campaign group FanFair Alliance—I pay tribute to the excellent work it is doing through Mark and Adam—conducted an opinion poll. Two thirds of respondents who paid more than face value for a ticket on a resale site said they would attend fewer concerts in future, while half would spend less on recorded music. The FanFair Alliance is spot on in concluding that touting is doing considerable damage to one of our great export industries, in which we lead the world and which supports 150,000 jobs.

The Government have been reluctant and slow to legislate on behalf of music fans and artists, but they cannot continue to ignore the damage being done by a dysfunctional infrastructure that is broken beyond repair.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am lucky to have venues in my constituency from the Barrowland right across to the Hydro, but does my hon. Friend

agree that if people are paying more money for their tickets, there will be less money to spend in the neighbouring venues? Cities will lose out as a result.

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is a dynamic hit on all associated industries and businesses. If money is put into the hands of the touts and agencies, it is taken out of the hands of the music industry and those in it. Come on, Minister! Let us reclaim the music. Let us make going to a live show a safe environment. Let us make buying a ticket a reasonable experience, where we will not be exposed to profiteers, touts and spivs.

This is an exploitative marketplace. It is one of the biggest crises we have in consumer affairs, and it is destroying our music industry. It is no good pussyfooting around any longer; it is time to act. Join the rest of us, Minister. Let us reclaim the music and make it safe for fans to buy tickets online.

4.18 pm

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) on securing this debate. The Government, along with brilliant groups such as UK Music and the British Phonographic Industry, have consistently championed the British music industry and the incredible talent that makes it such a success story and a brilliant export for this country. We have produced the Beatles, the Stones, Adele, Amy Winehouse and so many more. The live music industry is a vital part of the ecosystem, contributing £1 billion to our economy in 2016.

Our live music scene is clearly thriving, but it is far from easy for fans to experience it. We have all experienced the frustration of waiting for tickets to go on sale—our fingers hovering over the keyboard, only to find that all the tickets have been mysteriously snapped up in seconds. Given the time constraints of this job, I have slightly fallen out of the practice of trying to get tickets for events in recent years, so I was absolutely appalled when I heard about the practices now going on from my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams). It is so frustrating to see tickets reappearing on secondary sites almost instantaneously, at the huge mark-ups that have become commonplace.

The secondary market has a place. Real fans, who are sometimes unable to attend an event, should have the means of making sure that their tickets do not go to waste. However, the Government recognise that the process of distributing and buying tickets often causes momentous public frustration and concern. We are determined to crack down on unacceptable behaviour in the ticketing market, and to improve fans' chances of buying tickets at a reasonable price. There is absolutely no inertia in the Government, and I was sorry to hear the tone of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire.

We are determined to get on top of this issue. I will outline recent measures that we have taken, but first I will address specific concerns about the relationship between primary and secondary ticketing sites. Competition is fundamental to that relationship, and competition decisions are made independently of Government, and

[*Margot James*]

of Ministers, by the Competition and Markets Authority. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to make his points directly to the CMA. I assure him that there is no lethargy in the CMA or in Government about these matters.

We have already taken several measures. The Consumer Rights Act 2015 imposed a duty on sellers and secondary ticketing facilities to provide buyers with certain information about tickets, such as their face value and any restrictions limiting their potential use. Section 105 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 introduced a provision for an additional requirement under the CRA for ticket sellers to provide a unique ticket number, where one has originally been given, when putting a ticket up for resale. I am pleased that that provision is now in force, and that some event organisers are looking at how it can be used to improve access and protections for the ticket-buying public.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) on securing the debate; he has certainly sold more tickets to his public performances than I ever have. The Minister made a specific point about having a unique identifier for consumers. What consultations have taken place with people in the industry, and industry experts, to ensure that that is carried across? Such events can be really beneficial for our constituencies—particularly those like mine, where we used to host T in the Park.

Margot James: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. We are in constant contact with the industry. My officials have been in touch with the major event organisers UK Music to get the message out there that this is a powerful tool, which event managers and primary ticketers can use to oblige secondary sites to include the unique number on anything that they offer for resale.

I am also pleased, because I had personal involvement in this in my previous job at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, that last week I laid the draft regulations under section 106 of the Digital Economy Act, making a provision to ban the use of bots, and the purchase and resale—for profit—of more tickets than provided for by caps set by event organisers. I hope that that will be successful as well. Of course, the legislation has to be properly enforced.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Will the Minister tell me why the reselling of music venue tickets, which as we have heard is hugely damaging to the industry, is not comparable with sports tickets? It is actually illegal to have secondary sales on those.

Margot James: I think the hon. Lady is slightly mistaken. I believe it is only professional football that has that protection, for historical reasons. The rest of sport is dealt with in the same way as the music industry.

I welcomed the CMA's announcement last week, as part of its ongoing enforcement investigation, that it had secured commitments from three of the largest secondary ticketing platforms to provide additional information. It will come as no surprise to hon. Members that the one secondary site that has not yet co-operated

is Viagogo, which is controlled from abroad. I believe it is based in Switzerland, which presents an extra challenge. I echo the remarks made by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, advising customers not to use Viagogo's services until it comes within the law. The CMA is concerned that all ticketing sites, secondary and primary, accept their responsibilities to consumers.

The Government are also giving approximately £15 million to National Trading Standards for national and cross-boundary enforcement. I welcomed the NTS's announcement at the end of last year that its officers had conducted raids on a number of properties across the UK, resulting in four people being arrested under suspicion of breaches of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. I congratulate National Trading Standards and local trading standards officers on their excellent work.

In addition, the Advertising Standards Authority has recently taken action against the main four secondary ticketing websites, banning the misleading presentation of pricing information on those websites. Companies will have to show prices in a clear, transparent and upfront manner before consumers make their purchasing decision. Hopefully, that will put an end to the drip-pricing practice that has been commonplace.

Clearly, enforcement bodies are taking the matter seriously. We are prepared to go after those who flout the law or abuse the ticketing market. The ticketing industry and online platforms need to take action, and we are attacking the situation on a number of fronts.

Google recently introduced new rules for ticket resellers advertising through its AdWords platform, requiring them to be certified. To apply for certification, they will need to comply with a number of rules to improve transparency, and stop implying that they are a "primary or original provider of event tickets".

We are getting at them through Google as well, and industry is becoming increasingly adept at using technology to improve the ticketing experience, exerting greater control over the transfer of tickets through the use, for example, of blockchain and "ticketless" tickets attached to fans' mobile phones.

Mrs Hodgson: I welcome what the Minister has said. She has outlined the plethora of instruments and laws that we now have. As someone who has worked on this for 10 years, I feel that it is all starting to come together. I know she takes this issue seriously, but will she commit to keeping a very close personal eye on it? As those of us who have fought Viagogo and the secondary market for years know, they are slippery characters. I doubt they will ever comply, so we will be back here revisiting this issue.

Margot James: I thank the hon. Lady and congratulate her on her work over the years, and on her chairmanship of the all-party parliamentary group. I will stay across this issue. I have exactly the same suspicion: that the company that we have already mentioned in no uncertain terms will drag its feet and fight all the way. We will have to be across that, and I welcome the hon. Lady's continued involvement in helping us. I also welcome the work that the Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers and sports bodies have undertaken with the CMA to look at ways to ensure that terms and conditions are considered to be fair, particularly in instances where tickets were put on sale many months before the performance.

I recognise that there is no magic bullet to solving the worst excesses of the secondary ticketing market; it requires concerted and consistent effort. I have laid out our efforts as they stand. I thank the hon. Lady for her comments about how we are now pulling together a number of strands to deal with the issue. We are making good progress, but I have no doubt that there is more to do. We must ensure that the UK is a vibrant place for fans to experience great music.

Question put and agreed to.

Access Rights to Grandparents

4.29 pm

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered grandchildren's access right to their grandparents.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher, and I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this debate. Since announcing that this debate was happening, I have been inundated with emails, letters and calls from grandparents and grandchildren from across the country expressing their support, and many colleagues from across the House have told me that they have been dealing with cases on this issue for many years. I extend a special thank you to Dame Esther Rantzen and to Jane and Marc Jackson from the Bristol Grandparents Support Group, who first brought the issue to my attention. I thank the Minister, as we have had several conversations about this issue over the past few months.

This is not the first time that this issue has been debated in the House of Commons. A similar debate took place about a year ago. Unfortunately, because of purdah rules close to the election, the then Minister was unable to give the full response that I think he expected to give. A Green Paper was mentioned. I hope that the new Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer)—will be able to give a fuller response today. We will ensure she has time.

As I said in a question to the Prime Minister late last year, divorce and family breakdown can take an emotional toll on all involved, but the family dynamic that is all too often overlooked is that between grandparents and their grandchildren. When access to grandchildren is blocked, some grandparents call it a kind of living bereavement. Unlike some other countries, grandparents in the UK have no automatic rights to see their grandchildren, and vice versa. I count myself lucky that I had a very good relationship with my grandparents when I was growing up—I went on holidays with them and saw them virtually every weekend—but I am well aware that not every family is fortunate enough to have that family dynamic.

The estrangement of grandchildren from grandparents happens for a wide variety of reasons: divorce, bereavement, marital breakdown or just a falling out between family members. However the estrangement has come about, rarely is it anything to do with the grandchildren. That is why I have deliberately worded the motion for the debate today so that the emphasis is on children's rights as well as those of their grandparents. They are the innocent victims in family breakdown. The loss of the relationship with their grandparents is usually the result of a disagreement among the adults, and the children have had no say and no control over the matter.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, for children going through the trauma and upset of a family breakdown or a divorce, access to grandparents can often provide the stability they really need?

Nigel Huddleston: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I have received volumes of precisely those sorts of comment in the emails sent to me over the past few weeks. It is a compelling point.

Large numbers of children in family breakdowns are left very sad and confused about the sudden loss of contact with their grandparents, which in many cases goes completely and utterly unexplained. The children are then left feeling that they have been unloved by their grandparents or believe that their grandparents simply did not want to see them anymore.

One grandson who was denied contact with his grandparents from the age of 10 said to me,

“as a child, you are powerless to insist that you see your grandparents, however much you may want to. I feel a sense of deep loss, guilt and regret. I truly hope that my grandparents still knew of our love for them, and that we were powerless to do anything.”

Another grandchild referred to their parents’ decision to sever ties with his grandparents after a family disagreement as “an abuse of power”. While grandparents may have friends, partners and support groups to turn to and lean on, young children, as my hon. Friend has said, are often left to deal with the emotional toll of the separation from their grandparents by themselves. The situation undoubtedly also has an impact on the family dynamic and the relationship between the children and their parents.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): My hon. Friend is speaking passionately. My constituent, Issy Shillinglaw from Tweedbank, has been campaigning outside the Scottish Parliament for many years, every single week, for the law in Scotland to be changed. Does my hon. Friend recognise that the same issue exists in Scotland and that there is also a jurisdictional issue? Sometimes parents move south or north of the border and there is that extra challenge in ensuring access is achieved in different parts of the United Kingdom.

Nigel Huddleston: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has raised that point. I focus today on English and Welsh law, but the laws are very similar in Scotland and Northern Ireland. I know that campaigning groups have been set up to argue the same case as we are making in England and Wales. The jurisdiction element causes great confusion, which I hope the Minister will also address.

I have heard horrendous stories about children being put up for adoption despite the grandparents wanting to care for them. They cannot, however, afford the legal costs to pursue the issue through the courts, which I will come on to in a minute. There are cases where grandparents are denied access to their grandchildren for perfectly legitimate reasons and in the best interests of the child, and I am not seeking to block that. Safeguarding children should be paramount. As the Prime Minister said when I raised this issue in Prime Minister’s questions,

“when making a decision about a child’s future, the first consideration must be their welfare”.

She also stated that

“grandparents...play an important role in the lives of their grandchildren.”—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2017; Vol. 631, c. 1035.]

With this debate, I am trying to draw attention to the growing number of cases where grandparents are denied access to their grandchildren for apparently little or no legitimate reason.

I have focused on the impact of family breakdown on the grandchildren. I turn now to how the breakdown of relationships can impact on the grandparents. As I said earlier, some of the grandparents who have contacted me have said that being cut off from their grandchildren is like a living bereavement. One grandparent poignantly said that the grief does not have

“the closure or finality of death”.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman accept and agree that time is not a healer? The cases I have dealt with have gone on for decades and the hurt grows rather than diminishes.

Nigel Huddleston: I do agree. Unfortunately, in the letters and emails I have received the stories go back years and years, and in some cases decades. They are absolutely heartrending. Many hon. Members will have received similar and seen people in surgeries over the past few years. The length of time is horrendous.

Another common feeling is, of course, guilt. Many grandparents feel that they must have failed their children somehow for the relationship to have deteriorated to such an extent, and they are ashamed that they were not able to hold their family together. One grandfather said:

“I have been to the blackest places you can imagine and felt total despair and loss of confidence in myself as a father.”

Hon. Members could be forgiven for assuming, as I perhaps did when I first started hearing about these cases, that some drastic event must have taken place for family breakdown to have happened, but that is often not the case. Too often, the family rift arises from a simple tiff that snowballs out of control. As one grandfather said,

“there is an inevitable feeling that no one cuts people off for no reason but it can happen for the slightest thing, it doesn’t take a full blown argument, just a wrong word or a badly timed comment”.

Another said that,

“a lot of the time, the grandparents have no idea what the problem is”.

I have heard some truly heartbreaking stories from grandparents detailing how their emotional anguish has led them to consider, and in some cases attempt, suicide. One grandmother who considered suicide said that

“the only thing that stops me is hoping that my daughter will have a change of heart and let me be part of my grandson’s life again”.

Sadly, three grandparents known to the Bristol Grandparents Support Group felt unable to continue their lives without seeing their grandchildren. I was shocked to hear from one grandparent who told me that seven members of their support group had committed suicide.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My hon. Friend is right to raise this very important issue. Does he agree that when parents divorce, they do not divorce their children? The law now has a supposition that the parents should both be as involved as possible in their children’s upbringing when cases have to go to court because they cannot be agreed in mediation.

Does my hon. Friend not think that it would be equally appropriate to have a presumption that grandparents should be involved as much as possible in the upbringing of those children, unless—and only unless—there is a problem with the welfare of that child?

Nigel Huddleston: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point—he is very knowledgeable about these issues. I will come on later to the asks and the potential resolutions. He has absolutely hit the nail on the head—that is exactly what we need. That also involves safeguarding. I hope the Minister will respond to that point.

That this is a growing issue is evidenced by the growing number of grandparents support groups across the country. One has been recently established in my patch, in Worcestershire. The Bristol Grandparents Support Group has dealt with more than 6,000 grandparents in the 11 years since it was formed. Unfortunately, one experience that many alienated grandparents have in common is that they have sometimes had a visit from the police. I have heard from a number of grandparents who have tried to send birthday cards or Christmas gifts to their grandchildren and found themselves being visited by the police and accused of harassment. As Jane Jackson of the Bristol Grandparents Support Group said,

“grandparents are living in fear that if they drop a present at the door, then officers will come and march them to the cells”.

Of course, genuine cases of stalking or harassment are extremely serious and need to be dealt with accordingly, but it seems that our anti-harassment laws are being used as a weapon in family disputes. I hope the Minister will tell us how we can overcome that.

What can grandparents who have been cut off from their grandchildren do? If appealing directly to the parents’ good will does not work, the first step is to go through mediation. If that does not work, the next step is for grandparents to apply for a child arrangements order. Increasing numbers of grandparents are taking that route. Ministry of Justice stats show that 2,000 grandparents applied for CAOs in 2016, up from just over 1,600 in 2014. Unlike parents, most grandparents must take the additional step of seeking leave of the court before they can even make the application for the order. I know that is not intended to be an obstacle for grandparents, but clearly it is. I urge the Minister to consider introducing an automatic right for grandparents to seek contact through the courts.

As well as being emotionally draining, the whole process can be time-consuming and costly. Some grandparents have told me that they have spent three years and thousands of pounds going through the process. Time is not always on their side, and many are on fixed incomes and are dipping into their savings and pensions to pay for legal costs, as legal aid is rarely available in those cases.

Once a child arrangements order has been granted, enforcement can be an issue. One grandmother told me that she and her husband spent nine months going through the courts, had three court hearings, and were finally granted an order of contact, but as her daughter chose to ignore it, she had still not seen or spoken to her granddaughter.

What else can be done? I am calling for the Government to introduce an amendment to the Children Act 1989, to enshrine in law the child’s right to have a relationship with their grandparents by adding the words “and extended family” or “and any grandparents” to the section on parental involvement in relation to the welfare of the child, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate. As he is aware, on 31 January 2017, my constituent, Lorraine Bushell, held a lobby day here in Parliament. I welcome the right of the child to see their grandparent, but is my hon. Friend aware that such a procedure already exists in France? We can learn from that country and make it happen for our constituents.

Nigel Huddleston: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. That is a good precedent. Changing the law also changes the culture so that deliberately restricting the access of one family member to another becomes socially unacceptable. The legal change that France has already pursued is very important, as is the social tone that comes with it. That is a very important point.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I, too, am very grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate. It is clear from the number of hon. Members here to support him that this issue affects not just his constituents but the constituents of every single Member of Parliament. He mentioned the law. Going through a court process is painful, time-consuming and costly. Will his proposal ensure that families will not have to go through that painful and costly procedure?

Nigel Huddleston: I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. One of the important considerations is the need to ensure that children’s welfare is paramount. Some kind of court action is probably required, but we can make it a hell of a lot easier. I am calling for an amendment to section 1(2A) of the Children Act to provide for the court to presume that the involvement of a grandparent in the life of the child concerned will further the child’s welfare, unless the contrary is shown. It is important to note the phraseology. That kind of amendment would not grant grandparents the right to involvement in the child’s life if a case be made that it would bring harm to the child in question.

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this very important debate. I have been supporting constituents in Aberdeen South who have been denied access to their grandchildren, and I have been struck by the role of social media. Facebook posts can be used as a weapon, and grandparents sometimes feel punished by them. Will my hon. Friend join me in calling for UK Government action not just in England and Wales but in Scotland to address these points?

Nigel Huddleston: I will indeed stand united with my hon. Friend in calling for similar action in Scotland. This issue affects all nations of the UK, and I hope we can act with one voice.

There are unintended consequences to any change in the law. In the previous debate on this issue, questions were asked about what a change in the law would mean, in terms of clarity about who had the ultimate right over children and grandchildren. The Minister is extremely capable and is surrounded by a very capable team at the MOJ, so I am fairly confident that we can find a form of words that will work. I do not want every single iteration of unintended consequences to prevent us from doing the right thing.

[Nigel Huddleston]

I hope that this debate will raise awareness of the anguish that grandparents and grandchildren across the country feel, and that my brief summary of just a fraction of the cases I have come across demonstrates to the Minister that the status quo is simply not acceptable. I wish to conclude with the words of a grandparent who sent me an email just last night. She very eloquently said:

"My story has been going on for 15 years...The pain I have and still feel is indescribable and affects every aspect of my life...dreading Christmas, Easter, birthdays, mother's day, summer breaks...all the times when you would hope to see the grandkids. Instead, just pain and heartache—a life sentence. So although at 70 years of age I will probably die before I'm forgiven whatever it is I've done, you may be able to help the hundreds of poor souls suffering the same torment."

I wish to say to that lady that I will indeed do what I can to help, and I call on the Minister to do the same.

4.46 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) on securing this important debate and championing this really important issue. He referred to my constituent, Jane Jackson, who set up the Bristol Grandparents Support Group and has been campaigning for a very long time on this issue.

I seek to make only a short contribution today, to share the words of Jane Jackson, because her story speaks for itself. She said:

"Ten years ago, I lost contact with my granddaughter after my son's separation and divorce.

To not see our granddaughter was heartbreaking and, as is often said, a 'living bereavement.' Contact was stopped overnight. The last time we saw her, at the age of seven, she told us she had been told to 'dump her family in Bristol.' That was the last time we saw her. You go through the stages of grief as you do when you actually lose someone, except you are grieving for someone who is still alive.

Not being able to tell her how much she was loved was beyond words. I just had a constant knot in my stomach, a huge void.

She was my first grandchild, my first granddaughter, and she always will be.

She is the person I first think of in the morning and last thing at night. Does she think we don't love her anymore?

I have a memory box for her, with all sorts of things in it—pieces of a jig-saw. It includes a tiny bear she gave me that says, 'The best granny'. I certainly don't feel that way. There are so many questions and no way to find answers.

The acid drip feed of alienation is a very powerful thing, and I have no doubt that a very bad picture of us has been painted.

The emotions felt when this happens are so destructive.

Because when you become a grandparent, it holds such promise of the future, you being able to watch the new generation growing, giving them your experiences of life and to be a support through the highs and the lows.

I decided I wasn't prepared to go down a dark spiral of depression and so set up Bristol Grandparents Support Group. I had to turn a negative into a positive.

At my first meeting we had 6 grandparents. To date, I have now been contacted by over 6,000 grandparents across the UK, and we are now a registered charity with groups around the country."

For Jane Jackson to turn that heartbreaking series of events, which for many of us is difficult to understand, into the positive of establishing a charity such as the

Bristol Grandparents Support Group, engaging with those throughout the country suffering similar pain, and achieving such wide reach over so many years, deserves tribute from all of us. I have every confidence that the Minister will tell us how she and the Government in which she serves will seek to make the changes that so many people are rightly crying out for across the country.

I shall finish with an update, which I received from Jane only recently. She said:

"Our granddaughter contacted her Dad a couple of weeks ago and has been messaging me. She is coming to Bristol over the bank holiday weekend, which is going to be very emotional.

The little girl we last saw at age 7 is now a young woman of 17. We now start to build up trust and to start a brand new relationship. She has told me that she never forgot us and knows we love her—words I never, ever thought we would hear. It is early days and it could all change in the wink of an eye, but I have already told her how much she is loved, and that is the most important thing."

I pay tribute to Jane and to people in her position throughout the country. I wish them the very best for this bank holiday weekend. I support the efforts of right hon. and hon. Members across the House in seeking to bring joy and love back to those who have suffered so much dark and pain in the past.

4.51 pm

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) for organising the debate and for his excellent and moving speech. I thank the other contributors for their moving speeches too. At a time when politics and public opinion often revolve around Brexit and adjacent matters that are seen as huge, it is important to recognise that our constituents are directly affected by other, personal problems that require our attention, such as grandparents' access to children.

The bond between children and their grandparents is an essential one, yet, as we have heard, the latter lack clear legal rights to the former. In the event of divorce or family dispute, grandparents need to make an application for permission to see their grandchildren under a court order. At the hearing, the court assesses the relationship between the grandparent and the child. It is heartbreaking that a bond between close relatives has to be deemed to be significant, or not, by a legal entity, especially when the two parties are usually victims of a family rupture.

I have been contacted by a number of grandparents in my constituency who have sought my help after being denied access to their grandchildren. Colleagues have related similar experiences. To that end, I met Marion Turner of the GranPart support group, which is based in Northampton and Milton Keynes. The group offers such grandparents help and support to deal with the pain and loss, and it provides free legal advice from solicitors. The information it provides online and via telephone about the complexities of application for leave of court, child arrangement orders and so on is of great comfort to grandparents at what is a hugely stressful time.

I am grateful for the support given by that group in this matter, but I believe that there is still a need for a justice reform to treat the problem at the root, instead of people having to try to ameliorate the consequences case by case. To that effect, a few months ago my hon.

Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), whose constituency neighbours mine, with me and others, sent a letter to the Minister of State for Courts and Justice, who at the time was my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), calling for a legislative change to allow grandparents to have legal access to their grandchildren. Since then we have awaited developments. I therefore join my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire in asking the Minister—who is now, I hope, of some standing—to produce a long-awaited Green Paper, treating the matter with the attention it clearly deserves.

4.54 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) on securing the debate. We talked about it last Thursday, when we were away with the armed forces parliamentary scheme. When I heard what he was planning to say, I mentioned that I was keen to come along and support him. I have constituents who think the same as he does, which is why I am here: first, to support him and, secondly, to look to the Minister for her thoughts on how we can make things happen.

The issue is close to my heart. I am thankful for a wonderful daughter-in-law who allows me to bring my grandchildren to church and Sunday school, to tag along at family dinners when time permits and, with my wife, to enjoy family holidays with them. Such occasions with children and grandchildren are always precious, whenever they may be.

Looking to the past, I find that my sons always had a great advocate not only in their mother, who is truly a warrior mum, but in their grandparents, who simply adored them. No breakage in my grandmother or my mother's house, even of special china or collectibles, was so bad. If it was my children who broke them, their grandparents would say, "Don't worry about that"—it was not the same when I was young, but that is by the way. Even when it came to writing on the wall, it was never vandalism but artwork, and not a word was said, other than, "That's all right."

I was often amazed that the parents who believed firmly in the "spare the rod and spoil the child" doctrine when it came to raising me and my brothers and sister were suddenly converted to saying, "It's better they are spirited," or, "There's no harm in them," or, my personal favourite, "You're far too hard on them." That was grandparents; they see things that wee bit differently. Words that were never applied to me found a home when it came to the boys, and now to the great-grandchildren.

Why is that? It is because the job of a grandparent is to love, to love some more and to love some more again. Hon. Members have referred to that in their contributions. I heartily support what they have said, and what others will say after me—I am conscious that others wish to speak, so I shall not go on for too much longer.

Discipline is for the parents; joy is for grandparents. As a grandparent now, I probably see that better than ever. For that reason, my heart aches when I think of the more than 20 decisions a day being made under the children order behind closed doors in courts in Northern Ireland. It grieves me greatly to see what is happening. Rather than mediation, under legislation in Northern

Ireland families battle their way through the courts for access to children and grandchildren. An analysis of data from the family proceedings courts, the family care centres and the High Court found that 10,206 contact and residence orders had been made over the past three judicial years. Those orders can relate to more than one child. That is what is happening in Northern Ireland.

We have that system, which I wanted to speak about if I could in a short time. By comparison, Family Mediation NI, the largest provider of pre-court family mediation in Northern Ireland, received Government funding over the same period to assist only 750 families. That is just scraping at the edge of things. I understand that the Minister has no responsibility for the issue in Northern Ireland, but I wanted to give a Northern Ireland perspective in the debate, because it ties in with what the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire and others have said, and includes Scotland and Wales—throughout the United Kingdom. It is important to put that on the record.

There is no automatic right to apply for visitation for a grandparent, and that must change. We need to legislate to ensure that grandparents have their right to see and sow in the life of their grandchild, which is why I wholeheartedly support the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire and the themes and thoughts raised by other Members in speeches and interventions. I spoke on this issue the last time it came to the Floor—perhaps he secured the previous debate too—and I was later contacted by a lady who was not my constituent but had heard the debate. She thanked me for speaking out on her behalf as a grandparent. She was being denied access solely because of an argument between her son and his former spouse; it had nothing whatsoever to do with her or her family.

In conclusion, as a grandparent and someone who could not imagine life without my grandchildren, I ask the Minister to take the issue into consideration and to take the steps to make the changes necessary to allow grandparents basic rights to family life and love. That is all such people ask for: the chance to love their own flesh and blood, and not to be caught in the middle of a conflict that has absolutely nothing to do with them yet so deeply and irrevocably affects them.

4.59 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) on raising this important subject. I do not intend to speak for long, because I know others wish to contribute.

My motivation for speaking and interest in the issue stem from the wonderful organisation GranPart that my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) mentioned, which was set up by Marion Turner in both our constituencies. It is a very important support and self-help group for grandparents who find themselves in this appalling situation. I have gone to visit the group a number of times and have heard their stories. The emotions there are very raw. Some of the cases have only just started, but others have been going on for many years. It has been mentioned in the debate that time is not a healer—some of these cases go on for far too long. I have heard the stories; I absolutely agree

[*Iain Stewart*]

with the analysis that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire provided and I support his proposals for reform.

I do not have grandchildren or children, but I was a grandson. I think back to the incredibly important and influential role that my two grandmothers played in my upbringing; I cannot imagine what my life would have been like without them and cannot imagine that similar level of love and support being denied any grandchild. They passed away many years ago, but I still think of them regularly. Particularly in here, if I have a dilemma to resolve, I often ask myself, “What would gran have said?” in this matter. The answer often comes more quickly than if I had not asked that question. To deny any grandchild that support and love is absolutely wrong, where the grandchild is innocent in whatever the dispute is.

From what I have seen in GranPart meetings, the current access arrangements do not work. There are legal ways of getting access but they are too cumbersome and the barriers are too big. Many of the grandparents I have met do not want to go down that road, either because they cannot afford it or because they just do not want the anguish. It is a barrier that should not be there—there is a problem to address immediately.

In the debate last year and other conversations and correspondence that have happened, there has been talk of a broader family justice Green Paper that looks at all aspects of the issue. There are other issues that I am not as familiar with, which also need to be addressed, but I make a plea to the Minister not to delay in making a reform and improvement here, in the context of a broader review of family justice. This is a stand-alone issue.

The grief that grandparents are suffering is here and now. It is real. Surely we have the bandwidth in this place and in Government to address it in isolation. I am not denying that the other matters are important, too, but they can be looked at later on. I ask the Minister to have a separate look at this issue. Again, I thank my hon. Friend for raising this very important subject.

5.3 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I will not delay the House for too long on this matter, because I have spoken about it in the past. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) on securing this debate. As I mentioned earlier, my constituent Lorraine Bushell had an event here in the Houses of Parliament, when we were joined by Esther Rantzen. At that time, the meeting was packed; today, a number of people are in the Public Gallery to listen to what we have to say on this subject.

I want to make a plea to the Minister: I previously brought this issue to the attention of the Government and I hoped it would be in the Conservative party manifesto. I cannot recall whether it was—but even if it was not, I make a plea to her to make this issue a priority. Many grandparents are of an age that means that time is of the essence. They are not able to go down a legal route; many people would find that difficult not only financially but emotionally. People do not want to go down that route, because whether it is in a divorce court or between families, it is very painful for all those involved.

I raised an issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire that my constituents raised with me: the resolution is not that the grandparents have the right, but the children. The child should have the right to access to their grandparents. We could incorporate that into our law in this country, based upon the legal system in France or whatever. That would allow the possibility for children to be able to have that relationship with their grandparents.

Other Members have made reference to the relationship for them and for their grandparents; we all treasure and remember that relationship. My grandparents are no longer alive, but I often think that being a grandparent is often a second opportunity. When people are younger, perhaps they do not have the time that they would like to spend with their children because they are busy at work. It is a second opportunity to do the things that they were not able to do, perhaps because they did it wrong or they want to do it differently. Who knows? We must not allow this opportunity to go by. I repeat my plea to the Minister to take action on this issue sooner rather than later.

5.6 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I commend the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) for securing the debate. I am conscious that it focuses on the situation in England and Wales, which is why, as I indicated to you, Sir Christopher, I will keep my remarks short, to allow the hon. Gentleman time at the end to conclude.

I thank grandparents for the work that they do—in particular kinship carers, who are huge part of my constituency. The number of kinship carers who are grandparents is massive. Before taking part in the debate, I reflected on my own experience. My mum and dad split up before I was one year old. My dad was pretty much off the scene from that point. It was probably then that my mother was faced with the dilemma of whether to go and visit her ex-mother-in-law and take me with her. To my mum’s credit, she did that. That must have been quite a difficult thing to do; I respect it and I think we would all want that.

The Members from north of the border, the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) and the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson), mentioned the situation in Scotland. It is only right to put that on the record. The hon. Gentlemen made the point that under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, grandparents do not have an automatic right to see their grandchild, but can apply for a court order to get that access.

It is important to place it on the record that the Scottish Government are committed to reviewing the 1995 Act; the consultation on that begins this month. I hope that hon. Members will feed into that consultation and encourage their constituents to do so. My only word of caution is that it is paramount that the needs of the child are put first. For example, it is possible that contact with grandparents could allow a parent who has been deemed unfit to see their child to have contact with the child. That raises some child protection issues. I understand the need for us to get this right. I hope that the consultation will tease that out and we can get to a point that balances child safety and the most important thing: people having a relationship with their grandchildren.

I am grateful for the opportunity to sum up on behalf of the Scottish National party and I hope that any remaining time will be given to the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire to make his closing remarks.

5.8 pm

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) on securing the debate. We have heard touching stories today that demonstrate just how important the relationship between children and grandparents can be. Experiences of our own grandparents in our formative years, and of actually being a grandparent from some of our more experienced colleagues, make it clear that this relationship can be incredibly significant and often unique.

Grandparents can enrich the lives of children and provide one of the closest and most loving experiences a child can have. The relationship can be important in other ways, too. Grandparents can provide vital help and support for parents, particularly in recent years as increasing childcare costs have pushed parents to rely on informal care from family members. It is difficult to overstate the role of grandparents for many families.

Whether through our own experiences or through those we hear in our constituency surgeries, we know that family relationships can simply break down. Of course, the welfare of the child comes first and we should endeavour to ensure that that remains so. But the impact on the grandparent can be devastating. Many are distanced and lose contact, and they are understandably distressed by the experience. That can be made worse when they feel they have no effective form of redress to apply for access.

As it stands, child arrangements orders, established by the Children and Families Act 2014, determine where and with whom a child lives. They determine who can access a child, spend time with them, visit them and speak to them on the phone, and those people are named in the order. However, before applying for a child contact order, grandparents must seek leave from a court. In 2010, the Labour Government produced a Green Paper that considered that legal requirement for grandparents and, acknowledging concerns that it may be an administrative barrier to justice, vowed to assess the extent to which that was the case.

My party lost the 2010 election, and the condition to seek leave from a court was supported by the coalition Government on the basis that it filtered potentially vexatious access claims. Nobody objects to the prevention of claims that may harm a child, but does the Minister agree that an updated review may be important to understanding the impact of the requirement to seek leave, which may be an administrative barrier to justice? The Government promised earlier in the year to publish a family justice Green Paper, which would provide a further opportunity to assess the necessity of that requirement. Can the Minister tell us when that Green Paper will be published, and will she guarantee that the requirement for grandparents to seek leave from a court will be addressed?

For grandparents who succeed in their leave application and then find themselves negotiating an unfamiliar and costly legal system to gain access to their grandchild,

the removal of legal aid is a further barrier. Early legal advice is vital to ensuring that grandparents are best prepared to navigate complex legal requirements, yet cuts to legal aid have removed the right to representation in many areas of the family court.

The impact that an absence of advice can have on an application is demonstrated when objections are raised and the process moves to a full hearing. We simply have no way of knowing how many grandparents who find themselves without those vital resources are left unsuccessful or deterred from applying due to a lack of legal access. Does the Minister agree that cuts to vital legal aid present a barrier to justice and may leave grandparents without contact with their grandchildren?

Arbitration and mediation are, of course, more amicable, preferable and cheaper routes, and they have been found to work in many cases, but we acknowledge that family disputes may not be that simple and that, sadly, the courts are sometimes the only appropriate course. It is imperative that we provide a legal system that protects both the welfare of the child and access to justice for grandparents seeking to navigate complex and unfamiliar procedures.

I am sure we were all touched by the stories we heard from hon. Members today; I certainly was. I hope that the Minister agrees that it is incumbent on us all in this place to ensure that the justice system is accessible and open, and absent of obstacles that may prevent loving grandparents from seeing their beloved grandchildren.

5.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) on securing the debate and continuing to highlight this really important issue.

Grandparents play a significant role in family life. There is something special about the bond between a grandparent and a grandchild. The loving relationship that is formed often enriches family life. Grandparents provide stability when it is needed. They can give a sense of history and show how important it is to belong to a family. They can give familial support when it is needed, such as when it is difficult for more immediate family members to be called upon. My grandparents—in particular my grandmother—taught me many things. She passed on her values.

I, too, recognise the work of Marc and Jane Jackson from the Bristol Grandparents Support Group and of Dame Esther Rantzen. As my hon. Friend mentioned, I had the opportunity to listen to their points on this issue at a meeting he arranged with my predecessor when I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the former Justice Secretary.

Hon. Members have made important and powerful points during the debate, and many have written to me about this subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) pointed out that grandparents often support grandchildren when there is family breakdown. The hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) said that time is not a healer. In his impassioned speech, the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) described the grief of his constituent, whom I met, and the work that that family has done to support so many

[*Lucy Frazer*]

other people. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) reminded us of the precious moments that he has had as a grandparent and that grandparents can have with their grandchildren.

My hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) and for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) mentioned the great work that has been done by a support group in their constituencies. My hon. Friends the Members for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) and for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) reminded us that other jurisdictions are grappling with this important issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) reminded us that the law in France has already moved on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire told us some terrible stories about the effect on grandparents of an inability to see their grandchildren. He quoted grandparents and grandchildren directly, not only underlining how important the issue is but giving them a powerful voice in this debate. I commend him for doing so. He made an important point that children are the innocent victims in family breakdown, and that the best interests of the child must always come first, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon reinforced. My hon. Friends were right to emphasise that point. Children are at the heart of our family laws and our family justice system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire recognised and made clear the fact that there is a legal route for a grandparent to gain contact with their grandchildren. Under the current legislation, a family court can make a child arrangements order to determine who a child can live with, spend time with or otherwise have contact with. Some 2,000 grandparents go down that route every year. Let me describe how it works. A child arrangements order can provide for face-to-face contact—long visits and short visits, including overnight stays if appropriate. If necessary, it can also provide for contact to be made by other means, such as email, telephone or letter. The court has flexibility when considering whether to make a child arrangements order and, if so, on what terms.

Whether the court orders that a grandparent or other family member should have involvement in a child's life depends on a number of factors. One or both parents may oppose such involvement. The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service may be asked to provide a welfare report on the beneficial impact of the involvement of a grandparent or other family member, and any risk of harm from ongoing parental opposition to such involvement and exposure of the child to ongoing conflict. That report can also include the wishes and feelings of the child. As I said, the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration at all times.

Given the dreadful stories we have heard about the impact of this issue on people's lives, it is clear that the system could work better, and I am keen to look into how we can improve it.

Michael Tomlinson: We are fortunate indeed that the Minister has a good deal more time than Ministers normally have to respond, so I would welcome a lengthy response. The system she has outlined—the legal system

of going to court—is complex and heart-wrenching. People should not have to go through that. Will she directly address the point my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) made about a presumption, which we hope would avoid the need for people to go to court in the first place?

Lucy Frazer: As always, my hon. Friend makes an important point that he expects me deal with, and I was just about to come to that. He made a very important point about out-of-court procedures. We need to look at the expensive and difficult court procedure, which sometimes increases conflict. That is not just the case when grandparents apply to court; in family law as a whole, courts can provide resolution for people who really need it but also increase conflict, particularly in family situations.

Jim Shannon: In my contribution I referred to Family Mediation NI, which has the specific task of trying to sort things out before they get to court. It was clear to me from a Northern Ireland perspective that had more money been available to it, many of those cases would have been sorted out beforehand and would never have got to court—I think that is what the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire was saying. If we can get to the point where we can try to mediate and solve problems rather than get into litigation, with all the nastiness that brings, that is where we want to be.

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is critical that we solve these issues early on, before they get to court. We are reviewing legal aid generally, but legal aid can be available for mediation for early legal help. In that context, there is a fees remission scheme in relation to the application to court where the threshold is higher for people over 60. However, would it not be better if people did not go to court at all?

A number of issues have been raised and ideas put forward about how we can improve the system. One, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire and by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), was about the fact that grandparents have to apply for leave. Some people see that as an additional hurdle, but experience shows that grandparents do not usually experience any difficulty in obtaining permission when their application is motivated by a genuine concern for the interests of the child. That is because a person can seek the court's permission at the same time as they make their substantive application simply by ticking the box on the relevant form, and there is no need to pay a separate fee. That can be part and parcel of the hearing.

The leave requirement is not designed to be an obstacle to grandparents or other family members; it is meant to be a filter to sift out applications that are clearly not in a child's best interests, such as vexatious applications aimed at undermining one of the parents involved in a dispute over the child or continuing parental conflict. Leave was examined as part of the independent family justice review led by David Norgrove, which in its final report, published in November 2011, recommended that the requirement for grandparents to apply for leave should remain as it is because it

“prevents hopeless or vexatious applications that are not in the interests of the child.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire also identified the fact that it was unfortunate that sometimes children were placed for adoption, despite the fact that a grandparent might be willing to care for them. Grandparents can apply for special guardianship orders, and the local authority should give preference to placing a child with a family member. He also identified, as picked up by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), that there should be a change in the law in relation to presumption. We can look at that. He identified, and it is important to recognise, that some people think that elevates the grandparent's involvement into a right, whereas, as I have identified, the family justice system puts the child, not the grandparent, at the heart of its consideration. As he accepts, there may be some unintended consequences that we will have to look into.

Edward Argar: The Minister is rightly highlighting the importance of the child being at the centre. She also said that she is willing to look at some issues again to avoid the involvement of expensive lawyers—I pay all due respect to lawyers; she is a distinguished lawyer herself. However, will she indicate when we might see some of those proposals and ideas come forward from the Ministry?

Lucy Frazer: As a new Minister, I am looking afresh at a number of issues. This point, which has been raised by many people, is one of a number of family justice measures the Department is looking at—this morning I had a meeting on another family justice issue of concern. We are looking at these matters very closely. The challenge is that one size does not necessarily fit all. These are important issues but, as I mentioned, we must also look at the out-of-court settlement procedure. I will look at this issue carefully, working with the Department for Education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire said at the end of his speech that he wanted to raise awareness. He has done that in the past, and he has

certainly done so by calling the debate today. I commend him for his campaigning efforts, and I am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to respond to this important debate on behalf of the Ministry of Justice. Finally, I send Marc and Jane Jackson every best wish on reuniting with their first granddaughter.

5.25 pm

Nigel Huddleston: I thank the Minister for that response. Her tone is appreciated across the whole House. I know that she is diligent and that she is looking at a range of things, but I would like this to be quite high on that pile. I am sure she knows I will continue to hassle her until we get a response.

I appreciated several comments the Minister made, in particular the recognition that the system could work better. I recognise that family law is horrendously complex and that therefore there are no easy answers. We will be very willing to work with her and anybody else on ensuring that we look very carefully for any unintended consequences, because we all want to avoid those. We would all love to have a situation where we did not have to have such debates, or to have family breakdowns ending up in court, but the reality is that that does happen, so we have to deal with it. As parliamentarians, we need to ensure that we can help make the processes as easy and painless as possible for all involved.

Finally, I thank many of those in the Public Gallery who are here today, some of whom I know have travelled a considerable distance to be here, and who include representatives from all over the country. I thank them and I thank colleagues. I look forward to making progress on the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered grandchildren's access right to their grandparents.

5.26 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 2 May 2018

DEFENCE

Contingent Liabilities

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Guto Bebb): I am today laying a departmental Minute to advise that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is retrospectively notifying Parliament about contingent liabilities not previously disclosed, due to procedural errors. Her Majesty's Treasury has retrospectively approved these contingent liabilities.

The Minute describes the contingent liabilities that the MOD holds against 10 Defence Equipment and Support contracts (DE&S). It is usual to allow a period of 14 sitting days prior to accepting a contingent liability, to provide hon. Members an opportunity to raise any objections. Regrettably, this was not done ahead of contract award in these cases and I sincerely apologise for our failure to do so. The purpose of the Minute is to regularise the position with Parliament. The contracts remain fully enforceable and the associated contingent liabilities will be reported in the 2017-18 Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) annual report and accounts.

Failure to notify these contingent liabilities prior to the award of the associated contracts has been reported to the Public Accounts Committee. The Department has noted the Committee's concerns about this situation and fully accepts the need to follow the correct approvals and reporting procedures. DE&S has put in place a series of measures to address this issue including staff briefing; mandated training; improving the clarity of internal guidance and procedures; and additional controls in the approvals process, to ensure compliance.

The following contracts have a very low risk of the contingent liability being incurred. The liability is assessed as unquantifiable due to the nature, scope, range and scale of possible scenarios that might occur, which means that it is not possible to provide a realistic estimate of cost:

Supply of Cased Telescopic Cannon and ammunition—liability against consequential and indirect losses until 9 July 2018.

CTAI Common Cannon and ammunition project—liability against consequential and indirect losses until 3 June 2019.

Design authority support for Cased Telescopic Cannon—liability against consequential and indirect losses until 31 March 2019.

Supply of 40mm Cased Telescopic Cannon—liability against consequential and indirect losses until 15 July 2022.

BAE Systems Dreadnought design contract—liability against submarine design work until 26 April 2023.

Babcock design contract (submarines)—liability against contractor's personnel at defence establishments until 26 April 2023.

UK/France test facilities (2010) and sub contract—UK liability for dismantling and decommissioning costs until 2065.

The following contract has an agreed amount of contingent liability up to £1.4 million against a breach of intellectual property rights which expired on 31 March 2018 and a further unquantifiable element against a breach of environmental liability until 31 March 2025:

Land equipment service provision and transformation contract.

If the liability is called against any of these contracts, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal supply procedure.

The following contract had an agreed amount of contingent liability up to £7 million against damage to Ministry of Defence property which expired on 28 February 2018. No liability was called against this contract.

Support to combined arms tactical training system.

[HCWS664]

Counter-Daesh Operations

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): As part of our counter-terrorism strategy, the UK is playing a leading role in the global coalition to defeat Daesh—a unified body of 75 members. We have committed nearly 1,400 military personnel to the region to provide support to local partners.

In the air, the RAF has conducted more than 1,600 air strikes in Iraq and Syria—second only to the US—and provides highly advanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance to coalition partners. These strikes are undertaken in the collective self-defence of Iraq as part of the global coalition to defeat Daesh, and at the request of the Government of Iraq. On the ground, British soldiers have trained over 60,000 members of the Iraqi security forces in engineering, medical, counter-IED and basic infantry skills. As a result of the coalition's action, Daesh has lost more than 98% of the territory it once occupied in Iraq and Syria, and 7.7 million people have been liberated from its rule.

We do everything we can to minimise the risk to civilian life from UK strikes through our rigorous targeting processes and the professionalism of UK service personnel. It is therefore deeply regrettable that a UK air strike on 26 March 2018, targeting Daesh fighters in eastern Syria, resulted in an unintentional civilian fatality. During a strike to engage three Daesh fighters, a civilian motorbike crossed into the strike area at the last moment and it is assessed that one civilian was unintentionally killed. We reached this conclusion after undertaking routine and detailed post-strike analysis of all available evidence. There are limits on any further details that can be provided given ongoing operations and consequent national security issues. As with any serious incident the wider coalition also conducts its own investigation and will report in due course.

These events serve to remind us of the consequences of conflict and of the heavy price that the people of Syria have paid. It reminds us that when we undertake military action, we must do so knowing that it can never be completely without risk.

Such incidents will not weaken our resolve to defeat Daesh and rid the world of its poisonous ideology of hate and intolerance. The UK's commitment to the global coalition against Daesh and to the people of Iraq and Syria will remain as strong as ever.

[HCWS665]

PRIME MINISTER**OSCE: UK Delegation**

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): My hon. Friends the Members for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) and for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) have been appointed as full members of the United Kingdom delegation to the

Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in place of my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (David Jones) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Laurence Robertson). My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Damien Moore) has been appointed as a substitute member.

[HCWS666]

Petition

Wednesday 2 May 2018

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

6 Alderbrook Road

The petition of residents of Solihull,

Declares that local residents have great concern over the proposals to demolish 6 Alderbrook Road, Solihull and the planning for flats in its place.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to reconsider his proposals to replace 6 Alderbrook Road with flats.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Julian Knight.*]

[P002143]

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 2 May 2018

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Dagenham Diesel Engine Production

The following is an extract from the Adjournment debate on Dagenham diesel engine production on Friday 27 April 2018.

Claire Perry: We want the men and women of the Dagenham plants and plants around the country to have the investment and skills to lead the manufacturing of a new generation of cars. Of course, we already make one in five electric vehicles sold in Europe. [*Official Report, 27 April 2018, Vol. 639, c. 1228.*]

Letter of correction from Claire Perry:

An error has been identified in my response to the Adjournment debate on Dagenham diesel engine production on Friday 27 April 2018.

The correct information should have been:

Claire Perry: We want the men and women of the Dagenham plants and plants around the country to have the investment and skills to lead the manufacturing of a new generation of cars. Of course, we already make **one in eight** electric vehicles sold in Europe.

Sainsbury and Asda Merger

The following is an extract from the response to the Urgent Question on the Sainsbury and Asda merger on Monday 30 April 2018.

Andrew Griffiths: Today the Secretary of State and I have spoken to Sainsbury's chief executive officer Mike Coupe, and Asda CEO Sean Clarke, so that we can better understand their plans. [*Official Report, 30 April 2018, Vol. 640, c. 23.*]

Letter of correction from Andrew Griffiths:

An error has been identified in my response to the Urgent Question on the Sainsbury and Asda merger on Monday 30 April 2018.

The correct information should have been:

Andrew Griffiths: Today the Secretary of State and I have spoken to Sainsbury's chief executive officer Mike Coupe, and **Asda CEO Roger Burnley**, so that we can better understand their plans.

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**not later than
Wednesday 9 May 2018**

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