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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 14 May 2018

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, MP, JUNE 2017)

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2017]

SIXTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 641

SIXTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2017-2019

House of Commons

Monday 14 May 2018

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

The Secretary of State was asked—

Apprenticeship Starts

1. **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese** (Slough) (Lab): What assessment he has made of trends in the level of apprenticeship starts since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. [905245]

2. **Eleanor Smith** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): What assessment he has made of trends in the level of apprenticeship starts since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. [905246]

21. **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): What assessment he has made of trends in the level of apprenticeship starts since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. [905265]

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): At the outset, on behalf of all on the Government Benches, may I briefly echo the Prime Minister's words on the passing of Dame Tessa Jowell? She gave a

lifetime of tireless public service, and displayed incredible bravery and dignity in the final months. I know that there will be an opportunity shortly for colleagues throughout the House to pay tributes.

Since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, there have been 242,100 apprenticeship starts and we have seen a marked shift to higher-quality, longer and higher-level apprenticeships.

Mr Dhese: Employers and providers of apprenticeships, including in my constituency, are concerned that the approvals process for apprenticeship standards is far too slow and bureaucratic. That follows the news that the Institute for Apprenticeships cleared only four standards in April and 10 in March—that is actually down from 21 in February. What extra resources will the Secretary of State give the IFA to address those genuine concerns?

Damian Hinds: The hon. Gentleman's constituency has leading apprenticeship employers, including Centrica, Mars and Telefónica-O2, and they play a leading role in showing what it is possible to do with apprenticeships. The IFA has brought forward a programme called "Faster and Better" to make sure that standards are approved more quickly, and we have seen the number of apprenticeship starts on standards rising sharply. We continue to monitor that.

Eleanor Smith: Last year, the Government set a target of 2.3% of the workforce for public bodies on employing apprentices, yet following a series of parliamentary questions by the shadow Education team we have discovered that the vast majority of Departments, including the Department for Education, are failing to hit that target. If the Department is unable to meet such targets internally, how are we supposed to believe that it is going to meet the 3 million target by 2020?

Damian Hinds: The hon. Lady is right to identify the important role that the public sector plays and to say that we have to try additionally hard. She mentioned

my Department, and we have opportunities for training assistants and graduates through the teaching apprenticeship.

Judith Cummins: The Government say that they want 3 million new apprentices by 2020, but all the signs are that we are going in the wrong direction. Last year there were 70 fewer apprentice starts in my constituency than the year before, and nationally starts are down by 23%. Can the Minister tell us why that is? Do the Government agree with the British Chambers of Commerce that the apprenticeship levy is “unfit for purpose”?

Damian Hinds: The apprenticeship levy is an important structural reform to the way we do training provision in this country, to make sure that all sizeable firms are contributing to upskilling the nation. We are in a period of change, and some employers are taking longer to bed down what they are going to do with their apprenticeship levy money. We must bear in mind that they have two years to do that with each month’s money, but we are seeing a shift to longer, higher-quality apprenticeships, and that trend is to be welcomed.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I know that my right hon. Friend is committed to helping more disadvantaged apprentices. The Conservative manifesto said:

“We will introduce significantly discounted bus and train travel for apprentices to ensure that no young person is deterred from an apprenticeship due to travel costs.”

Will he confirm that that is still a commitment? When will it happen?

Damian Hinds: My right hon. Friend rightly identifies the importance of making sure that apprenticeships are fully inclusive, and we continue to look at ensuring that such facilitation is available.

David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that more women are taking up apprenticeships in science, technology and manufacturing?

Damian Hinds: My right hon. Friend is right to identify the challenge that we have in STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths. That goes for apprenticeships and for other parts of the education and training system, as well as employment. It is partly about encouraging girls through programmes such as “Girls Get Coding”. We are taking part in the Year of Engineering, and we continue to support improvements in gender representation through our diversity champions network.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that raising the quality of apprenticeships is just as important as raising the numbers, and that there is evidence that good progress is being made in this area?

Damian Hinds: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. In reforming apprenticeships, we looked around the world to see what the standards were in leading nations such as Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Having a lengthy apprenticeship with a significant off-the-job training element is very important.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State looked at the impact of cuts in further education on apprenticeships, particularly in Coventry?

Damian Hinds: Of course, through the apprenticeship levy, the funding available for apprenticeships will be roughly twice what it was at the start of the decade, and further education colleges are among those that can bid for that funding and benefit from it.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Further to the question from the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) about funding for the levy, is it not right that the levy is an important part of the reforms in this policy area and will ensure that there is long-term investment in apprenticeship training?

Damian Hinds: That is absolutely right. As I said earlier, the levy ensures that all sizeable firms contribute to the upskilling of the nation. It is an employer-led system to make sure that the apprenticeships that are done are those demanded by employers.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): May I echo the Secretary of State’s words regarding our friend, the late Dame Tessa Jowell? I think in particular of her role in the founding of Sure Start centres, not just as the shadow Secretary of State for Education but because when I was a young mum it was the local Sure Start centre that really helped me and my son. For all that is said and done in this Chamber, that is the best that any Member can hope to have achieved.

Last week, Ministers told us that nursing apprenticeships were the answer to NHS staff shortages. They set a target of 1,000 nursing apprentices, but just 30 have actually started training. Will the Secretary of State tell the House how many will start this year?

Damian Hinds: Apprenticeships are an important opportunity in the national health service, and we continue to work with the NHS and the Department of Health and Social Care on them. Of course, in the health service, as throughout society and the economy, apprenticeships are employer-led programmes, so the health service takes the lead.

Higher Education: Part-time and Mature Students

3. **Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab):** What steps his Department is taking to tackle the decreasing number of part-time and mature students in higher education. [905247]

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Mr Sam Gyimah): Part-time participation in higher education is absolutely important to making higher education accessible to everyone and promoting lifelong learning. We have adopted a number of measures to support part-time and mature students. For example, next year part-time students will for the first time ever be able to access full-time equivalent maintenance loans.

Chris Williamson: The Minister will be aware that since the Government tripled tuition fees to £9,000, the number of part-time student applications has fallen by

a staggering 59%. Even the former Universities Minister David Willetts has said that that is a disaster. Will the Minister take this opportunity to apologise to a whole generation of would-be part-time students and outline in a little more detail than he just gave what steps he is going to take to reverse this awful trend?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify the downward trend in part-time students, which actually started before the tuition fee changes. The Prime Minister has announced a review of post-18 education and funding, which will look into, among other things, flexible, part-time and distance learning, as well as commuter study options, to boost the options available to those who want to pursue such a course of study.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I declare an interest: I read history. Many graduates see an advantage in returning to higher education to learn a STEM subject. What are the Government doing to aid those people in particular?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend refers to the qualifications required for someone to be able to go back and study for a further degree. We have relaxed the “equivalent or lower qualification” rules to support students who already have a degree and wish to retrain in a STEM subject on a part-time basis. If my hon. Friend is contemplating an engineering degree in his spare time, the way is open.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): First, may I associate myself and those on the Scottish National party Benches with the Secretary of State’s remarks regarding the sad passing of Dame Tessa Jowell?

Last year, more than 38,000 non-UK students enrolled on part-time higher education courses. Such students are important for universities’ income streams and for the wider local economy, so what steps is the Minister taking to ensure that part-time students from the EU are not subject to harsh immigration rules post Brexit?

Mr Gyimah: Part-time students from the EU will be treated in the same way as full-time students from the EU. We have made our position on EU students clear. We will make announcements in respect of future years—2019-20 and 2020-21—in due course.

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): Does the Minister not realise that since tripling HE tuition fees to £9,000 in 2012, Tory-led Governments have been a disaster for mature and part-time students in England? As my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) said, there has been a 59% drop in part-time student applications. That has left scores of continuing education centres in HE axed, while our iconic, world-renowned Open University, where I proudly taught for 20 years, is in crisis. What is the Minister going to do now—not after a wait for pittances in the 2019 review—to protect the OU, where students will not benefit from the loans he talks about, and others from policies that have become both socially and economically insane?

Mr Gyimah: Of the £1.3 billion of grant funding that the Higher Education Funding Council for England allocated to support teaching in higher education last year, £72 million went to part-time study. The Open University received £48 million of that, and 47,000 students have

steady part-time courses there. We are supporting the OU. It is going through restructuring at the moment, but as I have often said, the review is looking at that and we will ensure that it continues to deliver excellent education for part-time students.

Sixth-form Colleges: Funding

4. **Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of funding for sixth-form colleges. [905248]

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): We have protected the 16-to-19 funding base rate until 2020 to make sure that every young person can access an excellent education. There are also the 16-to-19 bursary funds, which can be used to help disadvantaged students meet the costs of participation, including transport costs, and of course there will be an extra £600 for every additional student taking level 3 maths.

Laura Pidcock: That is not the reality in my community. To me, it is unjustifiable to provide £50 million for grammar schools when Wolsingham School, in the heart of rural Weardale in my constituency, has been forced to suspend its sixth form, which means that young people may have to travel up to four hours for access to post-16 education. The issues are inadequate per-pupil funding combined with historical debt from years of cuts and the failure of the funding formula to allow for smaller pupil numbers owing to rurality, not a lack of grammar school places. Will the Secretary of State please come to Weardale, and will the Minister also look into this case with urgency and provide some assurance to young people, teachers and parents in Weardale that they will have a sixth form come September?

Anne Milton: I know that the hon. Lady met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and that the Department for Education is working closely with Durham. The Secretary of State will keep closely in touch with her, because I appreciate that her concern is about the learners in her constituency.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): First, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the excellent work that she is doing in this area? Is she aware that the absolutely first-class sixth-form college in Haywards Heath is now closed, in an area where there is a desperate need for a sixth-form college to cater for the ambitions and the further education of many young people coming out of our local schools? Will she do her very best to work with us, Mid Sussex District Council, West Sussex County Council and the local universities to put together a really original idea to reopen Haywards Heath sixth-form college?

Anne Milton: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. Indeed, I was at school on that campus. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] It was a grammar school then. The Department for Education is working very closely with others on the matter, and I have to say that not only my right hon. Friend’s input but that of the district council has been brilliant. I would dearly love to see an innovative and a really groundbreaking project on the site.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): If the Minister is to get to the heart of these things, she must come to Huddersfield and see that we have not only two excellent sixth-form colleges but a further education college. We need all those facilities to be as good as they can be, but at the moment all of them are struggling under financial cuts.

Anne Milton: I look forward to visiting the hon. Gentleman's constituency at the earliest opportunity. I am spread rather thinly, and there are many colleges for me to get round. [*Interruption.*] I missed a football match yesterday.

Mr Speaker: Which Arsenal won.

Anne Milton: Well, Mr Speaker, I know quite a lot about sixth-form colleges and FE colleges, although I am due a visit to the hon. Gentleman's, and a great deal less about football, so I will not be drawn into making a comment.

The hon. Gentleman makes a good point: having sixth-form colleges, further education colleges, independent training providers and higher education institutes all working together is how we can raise standards to the levels that we all want to see.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): In both educational performance and value for money, sixth-form colleges are the most successful institutions in our education system, so when will the Government fund existing colleges properly and take steps to establish many more sixth-form colleges across the country?

Anne Milton: We are looking at the resilience of the FE sector across the board to ensure that it is as efficient and effective as possible. Learners are at the heart of all that, as we want to ensure that young people have all the opportunities possible. Sixth-form colleges do a brilliant job, and I am looking forward to visiting Godalming College on Friday.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): On the subject of resilience, how long does the Minister think it is sustainable for 16 to 18-year-olds to be funded 21% less than those who are 16 and under, and 48% less than university students?

Anne Milton: The hon. Gentleman is a doughty campaigner in this area; we have had many debates across the Chamber on the issue. There is a post-18 review under way, and we are looking at the resilience of the FE sector. What matters is that we ensure that every learner, whichever route they choose to take—further education or training through an apprenticeship—has the best possible training and education.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): My local side Ashton United, who do a lot with local schools, were promoted recently.

Funding for 16 to 19-year-olds has been frozen or cut every year since the formula was set in 2013. Will the Minister confirm that the real-terms cut to the base rate for 18-year-olds will be more than £1,000 per pupil by

2020? The Secretary of State can find £50 million a year for grammar schools, but what can he offer the sixth forms reaching crisis point?

Anne Milton: Once again I will not be drawn on football, I am afraid.

As I pointed out to the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), there is a post-18 review going on, and we are looking at the resilience of the FE sector, which includes sixth-form colleges. Opposition Members are banging their knees, but I am very aware of the funding pressures. I praise all those teaching in the sector, as they are doing an excellent job. There is more money available, including the additional £600 per person per annum for maths and the bursary funds that I mentioned. I have heard the hon. Lady's point, and I am aware of the excellent job that sixth forms do with quite constrained finances.

Children in Need

5. Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of outcomes for children in need. [905249]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): Of course, this is not a new issue; we are simply shining a light on it. We recently published extensive data showing the poor educational outcomes for children in need. A call for evidence has been launched to develop our understanding. My Department is also working with three What Works centres to build our national evidence base on improving those outcomes.

Derek Twigg: That was a bit of a poor answer. The number of children's centres has halved since 2010, 350 Sure Start centres have closed, children's services departments in local authorities are struggling with budgets and getting enough staff, and more children are being taken into care, so that answer is quite frankly not good enough. What are the Government going to do to ensure that we have more early intervention to prevent those problems from happening in the first place?

Nadhim Zahawi: We are determined to close the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. The early years are crucial to getting that right. The gap continues to narrow, having gone from 19 to 17 percentage points. In our ambitious £800 million plan, "Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential", we committed £100 million of investment to help close the gap further. Councils decide how they use children's centres in the overall provision, and I have seen great work being done in Wigan, Hackney and Staffordshire. It is not simply about bricks and mortar.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that the excellent review of the outcomes of children in need will look not just at educational outcomes, but at employment and other outcomes?

Nadhim Zahawi: I can confirm that.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I would like to associate myself and the Liberal Democrats with the tributes paid to Dame Tessa Jowell. She was an inspiration, particularly in the area of early-years provision.

Looked-after children in Oxfordshire could have to wait for up to six months to get into the secondary school that they need to, primarily because local authorities do not have the directive powers over academies that they do over maintained schools. What is the Minister doing to ensure that the most vulnerable children do not miss a day of school?

Nadhim Zahawi: I also pay my own tribute to Dame Tessa Jowell, who was a constituent of mine and helped me in this place when I arrived here as a young novice.

Those most disadvantaged children, to whom the hon. Lady referred, are actually given priority during the admissions process.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What about Shakespeare?

Mr Speaker: Well, we cannot mention Shakespeare in every question, but I am sure that the Minister will take his opportunity ere long.

Basic Skills

6. **Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve basic skills. [905250]

16. **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve basic skills. [905260]

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): We fully fund maths and English provision for adults and will do the same for digital from 2020. A record number of 19-year-olds now hold a level 2 qualification in English and maths. We perform to above the OECD average for literacy, at 14 out of 34, but we perform below the OECD average for numeracy, at 20 out of 30, and we have to change that.

Thelma Walker: When I met representatives of businesses in my constituency, they told me that many apprentices are missing core skills such as English and maths. What plans does the Minister have to address these concerns without placing additional pressure on young people through yet more testing?

Anne Milton: The new primary maths curriculum that came into effect in 2014 focuses on ensuring that children are fluent in basic arithmetic, including their times tables. The objective is for every child to leave primary school ready for the demands of secondary school. These reforms are already starting to yield results. Anecdotal evidence shows that fewer children are without these basic skills going into secondary school. My job, with responsibilities for post-16 education, is to make sure that those who missed out on that type of reformed education get an opportunity to catch up.

Kate Green: Government funding for ESOL—English for speakers of other languages—has fallen by 53% in real terms since 2010, and participation rates have fallen by 36%. Home Office-funded regional ESOL co-ordinators say that there is severe pressure on provision at pre-entry level. What additional funding are the Government going to put into ESOL?

Anne Milton: Funding matters, absolutely—I am not disputing that; but this is also about the innovative ways in which people—

Kate Green *indicated dissent.*

Anne Milton: The hon. Lady raises her eyes to the heavens, but this does make a difference. I have seen some extraordinary examples of adult education providers working with local primary schools to make sure that people who need English language skills get the support they need.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Why did the Minister not proceed with the grants for year 7 catch-up projects?

Anne Milton: I will have to write to my right hon. Friend about that. It is an area that falls between my portfolio and that of the School Standards Minister.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Daily Mile initiatives are good for our young people's physical and mental wellbeing, attainment, and readiness to learn in the classroom. Will the Minister therefore undertake to look at how these initiatives can be more widely rolled out in schools and also supported across Government?

Anne Milton: The School Standards Minister will have heard my hon. Friend's question. This is not just about classroom learning—there is no doubt about that. There are all sorts of initiatives that make a difference not only to how much children learn but their readiness to learn.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): This Wednesday is National Numeracy Day. Speaking as a mathematician—not a historian—I welcome the fantastic work that the Government are doing to increase critical basic maths participation for longer in our schools, especially for girls. Does the Minister agree that, as our all-party group on maths and numeracy report on early years highlighted last year, we need to invest more in basic skills in maths-focused learning and teacher training for early years education, so that through the development of number sense, all children can flourish in maths once they get to school?

Mr Speaker: It is also Mental Health Awareness Week, colleagues, as I am sure you will all be aware. I commend the ribbon to you—on top of the important point that the hon. Lady has made.

Anne Milton: I fear that when I take the national numeracy test on Wednesday, as I intend to do, my stress levels will be rising; I gave up maths at 15 after I took O-level. We should be shocked that one in two adults have the numeracy skills of an 11-year-old or younger—the figure is one in six for English—and that 11 million adults lack basic digital skills. We live in a rarefied atmosphere in this place, and some of us find it quite extraordinary to appreciate those facts. The test on Wednesday is a must for every Member of this House. I hope that they will join me in taking it, tweeting the picture, and making sure that everybody understands the need to be numerate.

Church of England Free School: South Birmingham

7. **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): What progress has been made on plans for a new Church of England free school in south Birmingham. [905251]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): As the hon. Gentleman will know, it is planned that Christ Church Church of England Secondary Academy will open in September 2021. Feasibility studies have been completed on the proposed site on School Road in Yardley Wood and will be shared with local residents at ward meetings in advance of the formal planning application in the late autumn.

Steve McCabe: I am grateful for that information. About this time last year, Ministers and officials told us that they could afford to close Baverstock school in Druids Heath because they had more than sufficient places in south Birmingham. Now it transpires that around that time they were planning to build another school a mile and a half down the road on playing fields used by local residents, including Maypole Juniors FC, for a variety of recreational activities. Can the Minister talk us through the economics of his decision?

Mr Speaker: Briefly.

Nick Gibb: The decision to locate and build the new school in Yardley Wood rather than on the Baverstock site is supported by Birmingham City Council, as that location will help address the need for new secondary school places not only in the Selly Oak area but in the neighbouring Hall Green area. The feasibility study shows that the site can accommodate a school and make greater use of the playing fields, and will significantly improve sporting facilities for both pupils and the local community.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: No, no. Gainsborough in Lincolnshire is a splendid place, but it is a considerable distance from south Birmingham. I know that I can rely on the ingenuity of the hon. Gentleman to give us his thoughts on another matter at a later point in our proceedings, but not much later, I am sure.

Safeguarding for 16 and 17-year-olds

8. **Fiona Onasanya** (Peterborough) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the quality of safeguarding for 16 and 17-year-olds. [905252]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): It was wonderful to see “Three Girls” triumph at the BAFTAs yesterday, and that was also a demonstration of what happens when agencies fail. Schools and colleges must have regard to the Department’s statutory safeguarding guidance, “Keeping children safe in education”. Ofsted has published a document setting out the approach inspectors should take to inspecting safeguarding. Inspectors will always report on whether arrangements for safeguarding children and learners are effective.

Fiona Onasanya: In my constituency, the schools that serve our 16 and 17-year-olds and that have sustained the biggest cuts were graded level 3 by Ofsted, which means that they are now deemed to require improvement. Does the Minister agree that the average of £300 less per pupil is having a negative impact?

Nadhim Zahawi: The same safeguarding duties apply for 16 and 17-year-olds as for children of any age. That would be the message that I would send to the hon. Lady’s school.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Sixteen and 17-year-olds are overrepresented in the secure residential estate. Instead of addressing capacity issues, last year, in the face of opposition, the Government changed legislation so that the most vulnerable children from England and Wales can now be placed in Scotland, miles away from their families, friends, schools and the health professionals who support them. Written questions that I have asked show that the Minister has made no attempt to look at the impact of this dire legislative change. Why is that?

Nadhim Zahawi: Placing any child or young person more than 20 miles away from their area requires the agreement of the director of children’s services. Children should always be placed where appropriate and the director of children’s services must make that decision.

Further Education Providers: Funding

9. **Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Whether he plans to increase funding for further education providers; and if he will make a statement. [905253]

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): We protected the 16-to-19 funding base rate for all types of further education providers in the 2015 spending review. I should point out that the additional investment for the new T-levels to increase hours of learning from 600 to 900 per session will result in £550 million by the time of their roll-out. We are also spending £20 million to help teachers with T-levels, and there is a host of other funding going into FE, not least the restructuring fund—£726 million was made available by the Treasury. There is also the local growth fund for capital and the strategic college improvement fund.

Gareth Snell: What the Minister really said there, in a very long-winded way, was that there is no new funding. T-levels do not exist yet, and the funding she has re-announced already exists. Some £1.3 million would have been available to the colleges and further education establishments in my constituency had the Department not redirected the underspend between 2014 and 2017. I simply ask her: can we have it back, please?

Anne Milton: As I pointed out earlier, we have a post-18 funding review going on and we are looking at the resilience of the FE sector—

Gareth Snell *indicated dissent.*

Anne Milton: The hon. Gentleman can shake his head—

Gareth Snell: I can shake my head, yes.

Anne Milton: The hon. Gentleman was shaking his head, but perhaps he just had a fly buzzing around his ears.

We are looking at resilience. I was at Leicester College last week—it was a fabulous visit to a fabulous college—and, interestingly, it said that employers and universities are now coming to it. The opportunities for FE colleges to generate income through apprenticeships and the apprenticeship levy have never been better.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The Minister will be aware that work has now started on the new £17 million high-tech and skills centre at South Devon College in Paignton. Does she agree that this funding makes the college the ideal place to be one of the first to deliver T-levels?

Anne Milton: I do not want to jump a stage in the announcements, but I have to say that South Devon College is clearly doing a wonderful job putting in that new facility and, I have no doubt, working very closely with local employers.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): As the Minister will know, Hull College has been one of the recipients of Fresh Start funding. However, a condition of the funding is that the college can spend only 60% of its income on staff, which has led to its having to get rid of 231 full-time equivalent posts—one in three jobs going from Hull College. Will the Minister explain where the figure of 60% came from, and how will she make the process more transparent so that people can actually understand what is happening?

Anne Milton: I am very aware that Hull College has had record amounts of funding put in, and we are working very closely with it to make sure that we get a sustainable solution for learners in the hon. Lady's area. Good colleges, and I see this as I go around the country, are about having good financial management and good leadership, both of which are crucial. I know that the FE commissioner and my team in the Department for Education will continue to work closely with the hon. Lady to make sure that we get the right solution for Hull.

PSHE Lessons: Problem Gambling

10. **Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** If he will take steps to ensure that the dangers of problem gambling are taught in PSHE lessons. [905254]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): At the beginning of the year, we invited views through a call for evidence on the status and content of personal, social and health and economic education, and we spoke to a range of expert groups. We are considering the evidence we have gathered, and we will make an announcement on the subject later in the year.

Philip Davies: Will the Minister work with Gamble Aware and other problem gambling charities such as YGAM—the Young Gamblers Education Trust—to ensure that schoolchildren understand gambling and the dangers of gambling addiction, especially given that

the Government, wrongly in my view, currently allow 16-year-olds to gamble on the national lottery and scratchcards?

Nick Gibb: Some schools already choose to teach about the dangers of gambling in their curriculum—for example, in their PSHE provision. During the recent call for evidence, we heard from a number of problem gambling charities, including Gamble Aware, and we are considering the evidence that they submitted.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the provision of integrated user-friendly programmes is crucial to delivering good PSHE in primary schools, and will he recognise the work of organisations such as Idecision and Headway, which I have the pleasure of hosting in Parliament today?

Nick Gibb: I very much hope that those organisations will respond to the call for evidence; we are keen to hear from organisations with expertise in this area. We are consulting on the content of relationships education, and we will respond to the consultation shortly.

Kinship Carers

11. **Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab):** What support the Government provide for kinship carers. [905255]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): The Government recognise the important role that family and friends play in caring for children who are unable to live with their parents. We have set clear duties on local authorities to support children living with family or friend carers, regardless of their legal status.

Melanie Onn: I find that answer particularly interesting because that tells me that the Government are doing absolutely nothing. Three quarters of kinship care families experience severe financial hardship. Does the Minister agree with me that kinship carers should get the same rights and allowances as foster carers, and will he take a first step by agreeing to discount tax credits from the benefit cap for kinship carers?

Nadhim Zahawi: Kinship carers actually have access to benefit entitlements in the same way as birth parents.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): On Friday night, I held a crime forum in Corsham, and outreach to carers and parents by schools was regularly discussed. Corsham high school already employs a person to do this outreach, and a lot of charities also work in this space. Are there any plans by the Government to review support and to share best practice, which can encourage social mobility?

Nadhim Zahawi: As part of our social mobility action plan, we are looking at all these issues. I would be very happy to discuss them with my hon. Friend.

Disabled Students' Allowance: Self-contribution Charge

12. **Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the effect of the self-contribution charge of £200 under the disabled students' allowance on trends in the level of students applying for that allowance. [905256]

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Mr Sam Gyimah): Official data shows that there were 4,600 fewer English full-time undergraduate students receiving equipment from disabled students' allowances. This is expected, because we knew the numbers would fall once students had to pay £200 towards the cost of computer equipment. Evaluation of the impact of this change is currently under way.

Marsha De Cordova: The truth is that the number of students in receipt of the disabled students' allowance for essential equipment has fallen by nearly 30% since the £200 up-front fee was introduced. Given that this charge is clearly preventing disabled students from accessing the essential equipment they need to further their studies, will the Minister commit today to reversing that £200 fee?

Mr Gyimah: I think the hon. Lady misunderstands the situation. The fact that the number of students who are accessing the £200 has gone down does not mean that they are lacking in equipment. The truth is that computer ownership is now common among all students, with students spending on average around £250 on computers. As DSAs are not intended to cover all student costs, we think it is reasonable to ask students to contribute towards the cost of computer equipment.

Social Mobility Action Plan

13. **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he has taken to improve social mobility since the publication of the Social Mobility Action Plan. [905257]

18. **Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): What steps he is taking to improve social mobility. [905262]

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): Social mobility is at the heart of our programmes and my own priorities. We have announced a number of steps, including delivery plans for a further six opportunity areas, and a pilot scheme to help parents improve their children's early language and literacy skills at home.

Lucy Powell: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. As we rightly pay tribute to the amazing Dame Tessa Jowell, who pioneered Sure Start centres, is now not the moment for us to come together across this House and recognise that boosting the early years is the route to social mobility in this country? Even George Osborne said that to the Education Committee the week before last. Will the Secretary of State work with me and others in the all-party parliamentary groups to look again at how we restart the Sure Start programme and to give life to maintained nursery schools, which do so much for quality early education in some of our most deprived communities?

Damian Hinds: We absolutely come together in recognising the fundamental importance of the early years. I am afraid it is all too depressing a fact that, from what happens from age zero to five, so much is predictable of what will happen in later life. Addressing that involves a number of different strands, one of which is what happens in the home, and that is perhaps what has had least attention hitherto. The work

of children's centres is also important, and there are over 2,000 children's centres across the country. It also matters what happens in childcare and early years settings, and we now have many more young disadvantaged children—71% of eligible two-year-olds—benefiting from the 15 hours at age two.

Sammy Wilson: I congratulate the Government on the additional funding that they have made available for the expansion of grammar schools, especially since grammar schools have traditionally been the mode by which many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been able to improve their education chances. To access funding, what steps must schools take to show that they are genuinely improving access to academically gifted youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Damian Hinds: That is an incredibly important question. Northern Ireland has a particularly strong record on educational outcomes when we look at the international tables. The right hon. Gentleman asks specifically what schools need to do to bid into the capital fund for selective schools. They would have to submit a fair access and partnership plan and, at a minimum, commit to prioritising pupil premium pupils in their admissions criteria. They would also have to re-examine their admission or testing arrangements and undertake outreach to support access for disadvantaged pupils.

Childcare Settings: Financial Viability

14. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the Government's policy on funded childcare on the financial viability of childcare settings. [905258]

15. **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the Government's policy on funded childcare on the financial viability of childcare settings. [905259]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): By 2019-20, we will be spending an extra £1 billion annually on higher funding rates to deliver 30 hours of free childcare. The rates are based on our review of childcare costs, which was described as both thorough and wide-ranging by the National Audit Office. We have commissioned new research to understand providers' current costs.

Afzal Khan: According to Ofsted, the number of childminders dropped once again in the last three months of 2017. We now have over 15,000 fewer childminders than there were in 2012. Does the Minister believe that funding levels have played a part in this dramatic drop-off? If not, how does he explain it?

Nadhim Zahawi: We are spending record amounts on childcare—£6 billion in total. If we look at parents who got their 30 hours of childcare for three and four-year-olds, we see that 377,000 codes have been issued for the summer term. The system is working.

Dan Carden: Evidence to the Treasury Committee shows that the Government's scheme is making childcare cheaper only for those already using it and failing to

bring parents into work. How have Ministers created a system that pushes child carers into poverty and out of business, and prices out the poorest families in most need, like those in north Liverpool?

Nadhim Zahawi: Mr Speaker, you will not be surprised that I disagree with those words. A lone parent has to earn just over £6,500 and a couple just over £13,000 to be eligible for the 30-hours three and four-year-old offer. The Secretary of State spoke about the two-year-old 15 hour disadvantage offer and that same 15 hours for three and four-year-olds as well. The evidence is clear that the money is being targeted at those who are in most need.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): The latest evidence that the 30-hours policy is underfunded came in the shape of a survey of providers conducted by the National Association of Head Teachers. It showed that a quarter of providers believe that 30-hours children have displaced three and four-year-olds who are entitled to only 15 hours of free childcare—the children most likely to be disadvantaged. Will the Minister tell us whether this was in the plan for this policy? If not, does he not agree with the chorus of voices telling him it is time to relieve the financial pressures on providers so that the poorest children do not miss out?

Nadhim Zahawi: This year, we will be enhancing our annual survey of childcare and early years providers with more detailed research on provider finances and childcare costs. This will provide us with robust, up-to-date evidence on childcare costs. I remind the hon. Lady that funding to local authorities for three and four-year-olds, delivered through the early years national funding formula, has increased from £4.56 to £4.94. As of April 2017, our funding rate to deliver the entitlement for two-year-olds increased by 7% in every local authority.

Mr Speaker: We move on to Topical questions. I give notice to the House that I would like to move on to tributes to Baroness Jowell at 3.30 pm, so it is important that colleagues are either characteristically or uncharacteristically, as the case may be, brief.

Topical Questions

T1. [905270] **Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): Last week I announced the drive for more good school places at selective schools, free schools and faith schools, alongside others, to meet local demand and to strengthen partnership between independent schools and the state sector. This will build on our investment in creating over 800,000 new schools places since 2010. Great education is all about great teachers, and this month I announced plans for a clearer system of accountability, freeing up teachers to focus on what really matters in the classroom. If children arrive at school struggling with language they are at a disadvantage and that hampers social mobility, as we were just discussing. I have announced two new schemes to help to close the word gap, including a pilot to provide practical tools to parents and funding for local authorities to share good practice.

Luke Graham: Currently, Scottish universities receive about £560 million research and development funding from the UK Government. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to guarantee that investment post Brexit and to support spin-off companies spreading wealth across the UK?

Damian Hinds: In the industrial strategy we have set out a long-term ambition to raise UK investment in R&D to 2.4% by 2027, and our guarantee of Horizon 2020 funding for UK participants remains in place.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): A hard Brexit could see Scotland miss out on millions of pounds in European research funding, damaging the success of our universities. The Universities Minister said that we will not participate in Horizon 2020's successor programme at any price. Will the Secretary of State tell the House how much would be considered too much?

Damian Hinds: We have to look at this and consider value for money. My hon. Friend the Minister is absolutely right to say “not at any price”. The UK, including Scotland, remains an extremely attractive destination for these research projects.

T2. [905272] **Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con):** What support has the Department provided to schools to help them to address cost pressures?

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): The Department provides a range of support to schools, including a national deal to help schools to save money on such things as energy, where there is a 10% saving, or photocopiers and other computer equipment, where there are savings of up to 40%. We are also providing buying hub advice in pilots in the north-west and the south-west and a new framework from this September to help to drive down the costs of agency supply staff.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the unintended consequence of the Progress 8 assessment system, as *The Times Educational Supplement* put it this week, is that all the losers look the same—they are schools in white, working-class areas with high levels of pupil premium. On the current measures, this will result in Ofsted having no choice but to downgrade these schools, compounding the teacher recruitment and retention crisis, and putting off prospective academy sponsors. What action is the Minister taking?

Nick Gibb: Actually, Progress 8 carries widespread support in the sector. It is a far better method of assessing schools than the previous method—five or more GCSEs of A* to C—because it measures progress and takes into account the starting point of pupils when they start secondary school. We think it is a good measure. We are looking at some of the details of the outliers when we calculate Progress 8, and we will have more to say on that in due course.

T4. [905274] **Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con):** The Minister will have read the Education Committee's report on the Government's Green Paper on children's mental health.

Does the Minister agree with the Committee that there needs to be specific, distinct proposals to enable looked-after children to access mental health services?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): That is a really important question. We are piloting new approaches to mental health assessment for children in care. The pilots seek to address concerns about the current mental health assessment for children and young people entering care, and to build on the recommendations of the expert working group on mental health.

T3. [905273] **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Almost one in three children at secondary school in the north-east attends a school judged to be “inadequate” or “needing improvement”. Rather than chucking money at grammar schools, when can we expect to see action to drive up standards and tackle education inequality in regions such as the north-east?

Damian Hinds: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to identify the challenge in the north-east—a region with particularly strong primary schools and early years settings, but with more of a challenge at secondary school. She is absolutely right that we need to work doubly hard, and I look forward to working with her.

T5. [905275] **Damian Green** (Ashford) (Con): I have seen the enthusiasm for apprenticeships from firms in Ashford improve markedly in recent years, which is great, but I hope Ministers agree that the quality of apprenticeships is as important as quantity. Is my right hon. Friend in discussion with the Institute for Apprenticeships about how to enhance the quality of apprenticeships?

Damian Hinds: My right hon. Friend the Skills Minister is in very regular contact with the IFA, and I also met it last week. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) is absolutely correct to identify that if we are going to make the step change that we need in the skills and productivity of this country, it is going to be all about driving quality.

T8. [905279] **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): As chair of the all-party group on art, craft and design in education, I welcome the Government’s recent announcement of extra funding for the arts. However, will the Minister explain what benefit that would bring to the majority of children who are missing out on arts education because of funding cuts, as evidenced by the recent BBC survey on this issue, especially as the new money went to the gifted and talented?

Nick Gibb: Yes, the money we announced was for those schemes, but we are spending £500 million between 2016 and 2020 on music and arts in our schools. We value music and the arts in our schools—they are hugely important—and those schools with the best academic results also tend to have very strong arts, music and sports facilities and offer that as well.

T6. [905277] **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): English universities are soon to start advertising for courses that start in 2019, after we have left the EU, and the

courses will run after the transition period. Will the Minister provide an update on the fee status that will apply to EU students on those courses?

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Mr Sam Gyimah): As ever, my hon. Friend is spot on with her question. Institutions and students need information on the support students are entitled to. We will be making information available for the 2019-20 academic year as soon as possible.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister for sixth-form colleges be willing to meet me to discuss some of the financial and capital needs facing Britain’s best sixth-form college, St Dominic’s in my constituency?

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman.

T7. [905278] **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome the work the Government are doing to promote mental health in schools, but could my hon. Friend advise me on what steps the Government are taking to support the mental health of students at university and in further education?

Mr Gyimah: The issues of mental health in our universities are extremely concerning, and I am working with the National Union of Students on its plans. Universities UK’s step change project, which calls on higher education leaders to adopt mental health as a strategic priority, is an important one, and one I support.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that when the hated 1% pay cap is lifted, the balance will be paid entirely from central funds and will not be foisted on to the schools themselves?

Nick Gibb: The Government’s position is clear: the public sector pay cap is no longer in place and we have adopted a more flexible approach to public sector pay. We have asked the School Teachers’ Review Body to use this flexibility to target the next pay award to promote recruitment and retention.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): What more can be done to help companies such as Turnock Ltd in my constituency and its owner, Gordon Stone, who has apprentices busy making Christmas lighting for cities and towns across the country?

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): I congratulate the firm on my hon. Friend’s patch and am delighted it has apprenticeships. The National Apprenticeship Service is there to help at any time.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): On Monday 7 May, one of my constituents was stabbed in a local park. Today, he would have been sitting his GCSEs, but instead he is in an intensive care unit in a London hospital having undergone life-saving surgery. Does the Secretary of State agree that my constituent, having been a victim of a serious knife crime, should not suffer now or in later life as a result of not being awarded GCSE grades, and will he put pressure on the exam boards to allow my constituent to be awarded the grades he was predicted to get?

Damian Hinds: All our hearts go out to the hon. Gentleman's constituent and his family. I do not know what is possible, but I will meet him as a matter of urgency, if he wishes, to discuss the matter.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): What changes is the Minister considering to ensure that the apprenticeship levy can be used to fund the type of training schemes and shorter courses that employers are demanding and which will help to get more people back into work?

Anne Milton: The apprenticeship levy is designed to make sure we get the money into training and end-point assessment and is critical to driving up quality. One year of 20%-off-the-job training for apprenticeships will ensure a rise in the quality of training.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sure that a brain of the brilliance of the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) can produce a question of fewer than 20 words.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Whitworth School in Spennymoor has had to close its sixth form. What is the Minister going to do about it?

Anne Milton: I hesitate to say I can change the world, but I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady to discuss the details and make sure we protect the needs of learners in her constituency.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): West Oxfordshire schools are frequently small and rural. What is being done to help them?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend will know that the national funding formula contains a sparsity allocation of more than £20 million for schools in rural areas, particularly small schools, to help to deal with the problem he has rightly highlighted.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): On Friday, the University of Chester Academies Trust wrote to its staff at two schools in my constituency, University Academy Kidsgrove and University Primary Academy, to announce savage cuts. Will the Minister meet me and other colleagues with UCAT schools in their constituencies immediately to talk about an urgent solution?

Damian Hinds: The schools Minister and I will be delighted to meet the hon. Lady.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Has the Minister given any further consideration to my call for a review of the pupil premium to ensure it is an even more effective tool for fostering social mobility?

Damian Hinds: The pupil premium is a really important structural tool to make sure that funding is skewed towards those who need it most. We keep it under review, taking advice from the Education Endowment Foundation, and I promise my hon. Friend that we will continue to do so.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): What progress has been made towards the development of a memorandum of understanding between the devolved and UK Governments clarifying how higher education institutions in Wales will be accorded adequate representation in UK Research and Innovation structures?

Mr Gyimah: UKRI has been launched to bring together work done in our universities alongside business and will be a bridge to engaging in interdisciplinary and collaborate research. I am happy to discuss the hon. Gentleman's needs further with him.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): In the light of information obtained recently by the National Deaf Children's Society, will the Government review their funding decisions as a matter of urgency to ensure that an entire generation of children with special educational needs are not let down?

Nadhim Zahawi: This Government have launched the most ambitious reforms of special educational needs and disabilities provision in a generation, and are committed to improving outcomes for children with SEND, especially those who are deaf as well.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I recently met secondary headteachers in my constituency who told me that they were almost at breaking point as a result of cut after cut after cut. When will the Government fund all our schools properly, for the sake of all our children?

Damian Hinds: Funding for our schools is at the highest level that it has ever been, and we have committed ourselves to protecting per-pupil real-terms funding for the system as a whole over the next couple of years. I recognise that there have been cost pressures on schools, and I am committed to continuing to work with them to do what we can to bear down on those costs.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Time is short, but I wish good luck to all the young people who are starting their standard assessment tests and GCSEs this week.

The Government claim that they have increased funding per pupil in my constituency. Does that increase take account of inflation and national pay increases for teachers and staff?

Nick Gibb: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, we are spending record amounts on school funding: £42.4 billion this year, rising to £43.5 billion next year. We recognise that there have been cost pressures on schools, and we are giving them a range of help and advice on how to deal with those pressures. For instance, there are national schemes for buying energy, computers and other equipment to help schools to manage their budgets at a time when they are having to do so.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): How does the Secretary of State expect local authorities to retain special services for vulnerable children, let alone share them, when they have faced—on average—40% cuts in total funding in the last eight years?

Nadhim Zahawi: We have made £200 billion available to local authorities in the spending review, and high-needs funding has actually risen from £5 billion in 2013 to £6 billion this year.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): In the last few weeks, we have tragically seen the deaths of another three students at Bristol University. What are the Government doing to ensure that the NHS and universities work more closely together to improve student mental health services?

Mr Gyimah: I am aware of the tragic deaths of students at Bristol University. The Government's Green Paper on mental health for students—that is, children

aged between 16 and 25—is focusing particularly on how tertiary education and the NHS can join up their services to prevent such tragic incidents from happening again.

Tributes: Baroness Jowell

3.32 pm

Mr Speaker: We come now to tributes to the late Baroness Jowell, former Member of Parliament for Dulwich and West Norwood. While there is not time today for many right hon. or hon. Members to speak, I know that many of you would like to record your memories of her, and her contribution both to Parliament and to the nation. I am confident—I repeat, I am confident—that there will be other opportunities for you to do so in the coming days and weeks.

Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, colleagues in all parts of the House: in offering my own heartfelt condolences to Tessa's family, together with my own deeply felt personal tribute, I shall attempt for once to lead by example, and be uncharacteristically brief.

The embodiment of empathy, a stellar, progressive change-maker, and a well of practical compassion without rival, Tessa Jowell was the best of us. I rue her tragic and untimely passing, which leaves all of us in this place, and countless others beyond it, infinitely and permanently poorer. May Tessa rest in peace.

3.35 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): Before I pay tribute to Baroness Jowell, may I apologise to you, Mr Speaker, and the whole House that I may not be able to remain to hear all the tributes as I am due to welcome the President of Panama to Downing Street this afternoon?

I am sure the whole House was deeply saddened by the passing of Dame Tessa Jowell this weekend. She was a most extraordinary politician, colleague and campaigner, but she was also a loving mother and wife, and our thoughts and sympathies at this time must be with her family: her husband David, her children Jess and Matthew, and her stepchildren Eleanor, Luke and Annie.

Jess said this morning: "It is the greatest honour of my life to be her daughter," but, Mr Speaker, we were all honoured to share this Chamber with Dame Tessa, and we are here to pay tribute to her life and work—to her warmth, her compassion and her incredible strength of character.

I was fortunate enough to meet Tessa while she was confronting her illness, and her dignity and courage were as humbling as they were inspirational. She was resolutely brave, not only in how she faced her treatment, but also through the way in which she spoke so openly about her illness and campaigned tirelessly for greater brain cancer research. Even at what must have been some of her most difficult moments, her compassion for others shone through.

Like many across the House, Tessa began her career in politics as a councillor, becoming an MP in 1992 and entering Government in 1997. Whether as councillor, a Back Bencher or a Minister, she was defined by her devotion to public service.

Throughout her time in Parliament, she would always reach out to an MP of any party who was going through a tough time; whether it was personal or professional, she would be there for them. For Tessa was a person first and a politician second. And nowhere

was that humanity greater than with the support she provided to the loved ones of those who died in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7. Her advocacy was so compelling because Dame Tessa was never one to take no for an answer, something I believe she put down to her Scottish roots.

Dame Tessa certainly refused to take no for an answer when many said that London should not even bid for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games. As Secretary of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, she persuaded Tony Blair and the Cabinet, the civil service and ultimately the whole country to get behind the bid. That historic summer of 2012, which brought us together so powerfully as a nation, would simply not have happened without her.

Tessa Jowell's political achievements were outstanding. But those who know her will also never forget her sense of humour. For many years after London won that Olympic bid the screensaver on her phone was a photo of her and David Beckham after the announcement—hugging. As she said: "You can be a feminist but still be susceptible to a David Beckham moment."

Dame Tessa brought all those qualities of compassion, passion and determination to her final, and perhaps most important, campaign: on brain cancer. Her impact was reflected in yesterday's announcement of the Tessa Jowell brain cancer research fund, and it will live on in an annual Tessa Jowell global symposium, to be hosted by the UK, to bring together the best clinical, scientific and academic minds on brain cancer.

No one who heard her extraordinary speech in the House of Lords when she spoke about her own brain tumour could have failed to be moved. As she said in that speech:

"In the end, what gives a life meaning is not only how it is lived, but how it draws to a close."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 January 2018; Vol. 788, c. 1170.]

Dame Tessa lived out those words. To the end, she fought not for herself, not for her party, but for everyone affected by this most cruel of diseases. It was typical of the spirit with which she approached her whole life.

The outpouring of tributes this weekend, from those who had the privilege to know her and those who did not, shows the extent to which her courage and service inspired us all. Her legacy will live on.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Prime Minister. Colleagues, it is typical of our beloved Chaplain, the Rev. Rose, that she joins us for these exchanges. I call the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn.

3.40 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and thank you for arranging this half hour of tributes to Tessa Jowell. We are grateful to you for that, and we are grateful to the Prime Minister for what she has just said about Tessa. Right across the House, people were devastated when they heard the news of Tessa's death. Like the Prime Minister, I send my condolences to her family and friends and to everyone who knew her well. The media coverage yesterday and this morning goes way beyond the coverage of the death of a normal politician. It goes way beyond that because it brings in the way in which she lived her life and the way in which she died.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

I knew Tessa for a very long time. She was a warm and compassionate person. Prior to coming to this House in 1992 as the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood, she was a councillor in Camden in the 1970s, which is where I first met her—I in my role as a union organiser and she in her role as a councillor. There is always a basic synergy between the two. She was Labour's candidate in a by-election in Ilford North in 1978, and many of us trudged along many streets in support of her at that time. Unfortunately, she was not elected then, but she came into the House sometime after that. In Camden, Tessa was instrumental in trying to bring an end to the pay dispute in 1979 by offering us lots of money. When we wanted a national settlement, she offered us a local one. It was very kind of her. It was an attempt to try to support low-paid workers in her constituency in Camden.

In Government, Tessa was absolutely determined to bring about Sure Start, which was one of the great achievements of that Government. The idea was that all children and all families should have a place and be supported in the difficult times that they were going through. Sure Start helped to lift 1 million children out of poverty, and I thank her for that. I also thank her for being an active NHS campaigner in London from the moment she entered this House in 1992. I worked with her on that, and I was very happy to do so.

Tessa's pivotal moment was helping to win the 2012 Olympics for London, when she persuaded a probably reluctant Prime Minister, an undoubtedly reluctant civil service and a probably reluctant just-about-everybody-else with her amazingly penetrating stare, saying, "Well, you've got to do it!" And of course, everyone had to do it and they did. She then showed her skills in diplomacy by putting together a team consisting of Lord Coe, Ken Livingstone and herself to deliver the Olympics for London. I have never forgotten her describing the chances of a British gold medal in taekwondo to a meeting of Labour MPs. I do not think that any of us knew what taekwondo was, but we did not want to admit that to her, so we all said, "Well done, yes, it's bound to go well." She actually tried taekwondo, and she was just as formidable at that as she was later in putting her case to the House of Lords. So, well done Tessa on that.

Tessa's recent speech in the House of Lords was just amazing. We live our lives and enjoy our lives and none of us wants it to end, but she was able to convey to the House and to the world that living your life is also about how you end your life and about the legacy that you leave behind. It was such a brave and selfless speech, and it took so much out of her, but she was determined to do it. Using her platform as a Member of Parliament in the House of Lords to raise awareness of brain cancer was truly amazing: well done her. She will be remembered for her passion, for her sense of social justice, for her sense of inclusion and for her sense of fun in dealing with people. Above all, she will be remembered for the manner of her leaving us. Her children and family are obviously totally devastated, but I think they can also be very proud of the legacy she has left behind. It is wonderful that we now have the Tessa Jowell brain cancer research fund, and I hope that we will all support that so that others do not have to suffer in the awful way that she suffered. She taught us how to live, and I think she also taught us how to die.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for what he has said and for the way in which he said it. I call Sir Hugo Swire.

3.44 pm

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I have been in this House since 2001—far less time than some colleagues—and I have come to distinguish between when the House comes together to lament a former colleague because it feels it ought to and when it comes together to lament a departed colleague because it feels it wants to. There can be no doubt that the latter is the case this afternoon. Many people in the House knew Tessa far better than I did, worked with her far more closely and were far more ideologically wedded to her beliefs, but it was my privilege—as much as being in opposition can be a privilege—to be the shadow Culture Secretary when she was Secretary of State, and I want to take a few seconds to thank her for her extraordinarily unpartisan behaviour.

Tessa embodied the best in a Minister—one who goes about their business trying to do what they believe is in the best interests of the country, not necessarily of the party. It was of course my job to rubbish the Olympic bid and to rubbish the dome, both of which I did extremely unconvincingly, I am sure. However, Tessa was unfailingly courteous to me and my family, and I miss her as much as anyone else.

3.45 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On behalf of the Scottish National party, I express my deep condolences to Dame Tessa's family and friends and note the passing of one of the truly great parliamentarians of the past 30 years. I had the great pleasure of shadowing Tessa at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport from 2001 and for the Olympics from 2005, and it would be impossible to find a more accommodating, supportive and open colleague. Even if she furiously disagreed with me, as she quite often did, she was able to do so in the most charming and personable of ways. I liked Tessa immensely. I enjoyed her company, and she was always immensely knowledgeable of every detail of her brief.

I remember when the London Olympic games were first announced, and I can say now that there was not a huge amount of enthusiasm among the SNP group for what we saw as further spending in London, but that was important to Tessa, and she had to ensure that the whole UK bought into the project. She selflessly went around the UK in order to recruit people as champions for the London Olympics, and she even convinced us of the merits of the case.

The games will be her enduring legacy, but so will all her work on Sure Start and the incredible, brave ways in which she faced the months at the end of her life. I only saw Tessa a couple of times during that period, but she was still the same Tessa—determined and feisty, but always personable and charming—and she would always remind me of the contribution of the UK music industry to the economy. I will miss her, and I wish her family all the best. Rest in peace, Tessa.

Mr Speaker: I call the Mother of the House, Harriet Harman.

3.47 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): Tessa Jowell was the embodiment of that old women's movement saying: "The personal is political." For Tessa, the personal and the political were completely intertwined. Her devotion to her children and her stepchildren was what underpinned her drive for Sure Start children's centres, with parenting support at their heart. Her enjoyment of her family and their prowess in sport was what lay behind her wanting to get the Olympics for the UK. She wanted them and the Paralympics to be shared and to inspire every child and young person across the country.

Tessa had a unique personal style. She befriended people who were struggling, had difficulties or were powerless, whom she felt she could support, but she also befriended the powerful in order to get them to back her progressive causes. She was no softie, though. Everybody has quite rightly said how charming and nice she was, but there was steel behind those clear blue eyes. As her constituency neighbour for 23 years, we went to countless meetings together and worked together on countless campaigns. She was always courteous and polite to the police, the schools, the hospitals and the council, but if ever she felt that they were obfuscating or letting people down, she would be tougher than anybody. She was true Labour, as an activist, as a councillor, as a Member of this House and as a Member of the Lords, but she was never afraid to work cross-party for the causes that she supported or to forge friendships across parties. We are so sad for her family, especially David, Jess and Matthew, but I know they will be strong because she will have prepared them for the loss they faced, just as she supported, on behalf of the Government, those who faced loss after the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks. We send them all our sympathy.

All around the country there will be people who are listening to these tributes and who have heard of Tessa's death who worked with her, who knew her and who will be feeling sad but also immensely proud that they can say, "I knew Tessa Jowell."

3.50 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a privilege to pay tribute to my predecessor as MP for Dulwich and West Norwood, Baroness Tessa Jowell of Brixton, on behalf of the thousands of my constituents whose lives she touched.

Tessa served our area as the MP for Dulwich—later Dulwich and West Norwood—for 23 years from 1992 with a commitment to making a difference every single day. Her legacy is extraordinary, from five brilliant new schools to Sure Start centres, the turnaround of King's College Hospital and the countless community groups she championed. Tessa is much loved across the constituency for the things she delivered, but perhaps even more for her deep empathy and compassion, her ability to connect with people and the way she worked collaboratively to empower others.

Tessa's legacy is national as well as local. Sure Start was born of her passionate belief in the need to address the disadvantage affecting children at the earliest opportunity, and Sure Start centres have transformed the lives of countless families. It was Tessa's vision, which she nurtured from idea to completion, that the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics should be not

just a singular sporting event but the vehicle for transformative long-term investment in east London and the most authentic and glorious celebration of London and Londoners that we have ever seen.

I last saw Tessa a few weeks ago, when her presence lit up this Chamber as she attended the debate in her honour led by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones). Tessa's commitment to using her devastating brain tumour diagnosis to campaign to make a difference for others was no surprise to anyone who knew her, but it was nevertheless extraordinary and extremely brave. At a reception following the debate, Tessa was determined to speak. Although her language was much affected by her tumour, among the words she managed to articulate were "determined," "love" and "lucky"—the essence of Tessa, whose determination and love led her to deliver so much and who leaves so many of us feeling lucky to have known her.

Tessa's legacy in Dulwich and West Norwood is in our schools, our hospital and our community, and it is in our culture of campaigning, which puts people at its centre. We are grateful to have had so much of her time. Our thoughts and love are with David, Jessie and Matthew and the rest of Tessa's family on their deep loss. I hope they will take some comfort from knowing that Tessa leaves the world a far better place than she found it, and that there are many in Dulwich and West Norwood, and across the country, who will ensure that her tremendous legacy lives on.

3.53 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On behalf of Liberal Democrats in Parliament and, indeed, throughout the country, I offer our condolences to the family and friends of Tessa Jowell.

Tessa was already a Cabinet Minister when I was first elected in 2001 so, unlike others, I cannot claim to have had a close association with her as she made her way up through the ranks. When I speak to my colleagues and former colleagues who did know her well, either from her time in office here or from working on the 2012 London Olympics, I get the same messages time and again: always cheerful; good at building consensus; boundless energy; and a natural team player. Perhaps less well known and less remarked upon is the fact that all those qualities were displayed towards not just MPs, peers and Ministers, but all others with whom she worked in Parliament and in the civil service. When I was Secretary of State for Scotland, I acquired a member of my private office who had previously worked as part of Tessa's private office in the then Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Despite it being more than four years since he had worked as part of Tessa's team, he always spoke warmly—and with very little prompting—about how great it had been to work with her. Like so many others, he spoke with pride and affection. He was always kind enough never to draw a direct comparison with his experience working for me; for once, I was sensible enough not to ask.

Although one would not have known it to listen to her speak, Tessa had a long-standing association with the north-east of Scotland. She was educated there, in St Margaret's School for Girls in Aberdeen and later at Aberdeen University, where she was both a graduate and an honorary graduate. The university principal,

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, spoke yesterday of her helpfulness and humanity. Unlike some universities, the University of Aberdeen has never been over-represented on these Benches but—I declare an interest as an alumnus—I like to think that what we lack in quantity we have been able to make up for in quality. I have never been able to think of a better way of advancing that argument than by reference to Tessa Jowell.

Tessa Jowell leaves a legacy that is substantial in politics, and it will be enduring. I think that she would be a little frustrated to think that her life might be defined by the way in which it ended but, as a member of the all-party group on brain tumours, I want to comment on the enormous impact she has made for those who suffer from brain cancers. A couple of years ago, I raised with David Cameron at Prime Minister's questions the subject of funding for brain tumour research. I was astonished at the response I got—emails and messages from people thanking me for raising the issue and saying that this was something that affected their son, daughter, husband, wife, friend or neighbour. They came from people whose lives had been touched by the condition—some of whom I knew quite well—but who never felt able to talk about it. For some reason that is well beyond my understanding, brain cancers seem to be the last cancer taboo in our society, but because of the way in which Tessa Jowell dealt with hers—with courage and candour—I am sure that that taboo is weaker today than it has ever been. The money for research will doubtless help us to find better cures, but Tessa's courage will be the biggest hope and encouragement to thousands.

3.57 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Last month we held a debate on cancer and paid tribute to Tessa. Just before that debate, Tessa said to me, "This is not about me; this is about what comes next." She would therefore not forgive me if I did not both welcome the new Government money that has been announced today and say that together we can go further. I look forward to working with the Government on the data sharing, clinical trials and research to come.

Having been helped by Tessa, having been friends with her and having been her employee, I saw the velvet and the steel in Tessa Jowell. She always got what she wanted, but she always wanted the best for others. The best advice she ever gave me—and gave anyone—was, "Never take no for an answer." She never gave up. I wish to repeat the words from Tessa that I read out in the debate here last month:

"It was the honour of my life to be one of you, and I shall cheer on from the sidelines as you keep fighting the good fight. So remember our battle cry: living with, not dying of, cancer. For more people, for longer. Thank you."

3.59 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): I first really got to know Tessa when we were both very pregnant—I with my last child, and she with her first, Jessie. In those days, we did try to cuddle each other, but we were both slightly vertically challenged, so with these big bellies, it was—

Mr Speaker: There is a lot to be said for it.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): What, pregnancy?

Mr Speaker: The vertical challenge.

Dame Margaret Hodge: It was jolly hard to get your arms around her, but that was what you always wanted to do with Tessa: you did want to give her a cuddle. I remember the early days of our relationship, when we would spend the time talking about nappies and sleepless nights on the one hand, and on the other discussing how we would make Labour electable and our latest very good idea. That was her, really; as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) said, the personal was very much the political with Tessa.

Tessa was already a successful politician before she came into Parliament. I knew her when she was chair of social services in Camden, and she chaired the social services committee at the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. She did incredibly radical things on diversity and on care for the elderly in the community. I well remember that she worked for a while for Birmingham City Council and tried to devise its policy for caring for the elderly outside of old people's homes. She did what Tessa would always do: she spent endless nights in those homes so that she could really feel what the people who were living that life felt. That informed the way in which she devised policy.

As well as being a feminist—she was a feminist with many of us during the '70s, '80s and '90s—Tessa was incredibly feminine. Her home was always filled with fresh flowers, and Friday was Tessa on the splurge, going to buy lots of flowers. While her husband David cooked the meals, she created the ambiance that made people feel positive and comfortable, with beautiful things around the room. She was the go-to person if you wanted any advice on style: for hair—we shared the same hairdresser; for fitness—she went to this absolutely ghastly place in Austria where they really pulled it out of you; and for the most beautiful clothes. When we went to Pontignano for an annual get-together of the Italian and UK left, we would go off for an afternoon to see what was in the Siena shops.

Tessa was a people-focused politician and a feminist, and she showed awesome courage all the way through her life, but particularly in her last years. Death is a part of all our lives, but the people who were with us yesterday remain a part of all our present and our future. Tessa touched countless people's lives when she lived; their experience will form part of the legacy that she leaves behind. We salute her and celebrate who she was and what she achieved.

4.2 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Tessa was the mother of Sure Start, and also Britain's first Public Health Minister. She started some amazing things, including the teenage pregnancy strategy, which worked, and Sure Start itself, into which she threw so much of herself—literally. I was lucky enough to follow her into the Public Health job and to see some of the amazing work she had done. The things that were most valuable in Sure Start—not only the warmth, the empathy, and the focus on families and whole communities, but the ambition, the aspiration, and that wider support and emotion—were also all the things that we valued

about Tessa and her life. What she saw in her own family, with David, Jessie and Matthew—all her family, for whom we now feel so much—was what she worked so hard to provide for other families throughout the country.

I know that when we think about Tessa and the Olympics, we are supposed to think about her steely determination in getting the games to happen. We are supposed to think about her amazing values of inclusion and diversity, which she infused throughout the Olympics, whether in the amazing Danny Boyle opening ceremony that she commissioned, the games makers she championed, or the sending of the torch all around the country. All that is true, but I cannot help but keep remembering a meeting before the London Olympics in which she briefed us in some detail, and with great frankness, about her plans to distribute condoms throughout the Olympic village. She said, “Well, there are going to be all these athletes with their beautiful bodies, and when they finish their races they’re going to have a lot of sex, and we have a responsibility to keep them safe!” That, in the end, along with the twinkle in her eye, was Tessa. She was completely down to earth and practical; she had no qualms or squeamishness about all aspects of people’s lives. That was what made her so remarkable—that down-to-earth quality and also the great visions that she had. We know that she leaves a huge legacy not just around cancer, not just around the Olympics, not just around Sure Start, and not just in the hearts of all those who met her and were inspired by her, but for all those who did not meet her but whose lives were changed for the better by the work that she did.

4.5 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): In following my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), as a former Public Health Minister, I can say that I was so glad that Tessa put the public health case for condoms during that briefing—once a Public Health Minister, always a Public Health Minister.

Tessa was a lovely and delightful person, but she was not a saint. There were a few off-the-record conversations and discussions that we had when she let rip with a few choice swear words. We were part of a relatively small group of colleagues—Hazel Blears, Jacqui Smith, Ruth Kelly, Baroness Scotland—who had a “Come Dine with Me” club. Occasionally we would try to escape this place, and one of us would cook for the rest of the group. I remember the papers got a sniff of this somewhere and said that we were plotting some terrible overthrow or what have you. To be honest, we just got together to have a nice glass of wine, give points for the food that we were being served by the person whose turn it was, and to have a good gossip about this place.

Tessa was a great listener. She was always hands on in every job that she did. In many respects, she sets an example for Ministers today and in the future. One thing about the jobs she did—whether it was Minister for Public Health, for the Olympics or for London—was that she put her heart and soul into them. She was not looking to the next job or the next promotion. She devoted herself to the job in hand. Truthfully, Tessa had so many firsts to be proud of, but she would have been a great Secretary of State for Health. Actually, she would have been a great Foreign Secretary, given her talent for

bringing people together. At this very sad time, emotions will be raw for her family, but she will live on through them and their children. For all of us, she will live on in our hearts.

4.7 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I first met Tessa in a stable. It was the 1992 general election, and I was the shadow Home Office Minister—the deputy to Roy Hattersley—covering policing. Roy said, “Go down to the stables where the Metropolitan police have their horses and get a photo opportunity with this candidate.” I pitched up somewhere, which must have been in the constituency, and saw this very lovely young candidate standing near three enormous horses snorting—there was not exactly fire coming out of their noses, but it was pretty close. If anyone has been close to one of those horses, they will know how big they are. The PR person said, “One of you has to get on that horse for the photograph.” I said, “Well, I’m only here to support Tessa.” I’ll tell you what: Tessa—and she was small—stepped up and stroked the nose of the horse, and in about two minutes, she was his best friend. She got up on the horse—I remember putting the hat on—and we had the photo opportunity. That was how I first met Tessa. When she arrived in this House, we already had something in common.

I have been in this place for quite a long time. I have seen some really superb parliamentarians on both sides of the House, but there are some who bring a certain sparkle to this place—they are just different. Mo Mowlam was one, and Tessa was as well. David Beckham was not the only person who got a hug from Tessa. If you pleased her or if you did something as part of her team, she gave you a hug. She liked to give a hug. She also brought fun into this place. Sometimes we are a bit dreary in these Chambers. If Tessa walked into a room, it felt like a bit of joy was coming through the door. I remember her with love and affection. I remember her enlivening this Parliament, which can sometimes be a bit dry and dusty. I especially remember that she had that quality of sparkle. Although I am a bit of a bad Christian, I still think of both of them—Mo Mowlam and Tessa—up there smiling and bringing joy wherever they are.

4.9 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): There have been many wonderful tributes to Tessa. One of the many that would have pleased her hugely was yesterday’s from the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair. He described in detail the rigour with which Tessa put forward her case in the now famous meeting at which she pitched the Olympics to him. Tessa described that same meeting to me a few years ago, and it was identical to Mr Blair’s description—with one addition. She said that at the end of the meeting she turned informally to him and said, “Do you want to be the Prime Minister who had the Olympics within their grasp and chose to turn away?” That, for me, was Tessa. She had learnt to weaponise the male ego, and woe betide any big beast that stood between her and one of her political objectives. That somebody could have an Olympic-sized vision and make it happen, yet do so leaving nothing but a trail of love and laughter, is a modern day political miracle. For those of us who knew her, she was that miracle. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Mr Speaker: That was a very special tribute, and the reaction of the House to the hon. Gentleman tells its own story.

4.11 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I wish to add my contribution and heartfelt words on behalf of the Democratic Unionist party. I commend all who have spoken so far, including you, Mr Speaker. You have a tremendous grasp of the English language and set things out in a succinct and helpful way—we all appreciate that very much.

I may have only been here a short time, but I recall Dame Tessa Jowell's wise and helpful contributions in this House both while I was here and before I came to the House. She had an everlasting smile. I always felt that she was a lady who I would not want to get on the wrong side of, as other Members have said, but she reached out to people everywhere. One of my constituents phoned me this morning to say that she was moved by Tessa's life, and by her courage, strength and determination that shone through. Tessa touched the lives of many.

On a Thursday some three weeks ago, we had a debate in this Chamber on brain cancer. You were also present for that very emotional debate, Mr Speaker. Tessa sat right through the debate—very much a campaign warrior—not too far from where I stand now. She was so very obviously in pain, with her head gently resting on her husband's shoulder, alongside her family, who were there to support her.

At this time of sorrow and grief, I say to Tessa's husband, family, friends and the many colleagues in this House who knew her much better than I did: we have fond memories of a lady who we will all miss greatly, but we remember with joy what she did in this House right to the very end. God bless Tessa.

4.12 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): We have heard a lot today about what Tessa did—her outstanding legacy of bringing the Olympics and Paralympics to London, and her amazing work—but I want to talk a little bit about how she did it. I remember a fantastic speech that she gave at the Labour party conference in 2005, when I was a newly elected MP. She spoke about her plans to roll out music education to every child, and mentioned a conversation that she had had with a lady in a tower block in Lambeth. She talked about that lady's daughter, saying, "I want this music education programme to reach everyone. The test will be: will Rosa learn to play the violin?" I am pretty certain that Rosa, in that tower block in Lambeth, did get to play her violin.

I remember running into Tessa in the middle of the Olympic games, when she was incredibly busy and under pressure. I asked her, "What's going on? How are you, Tessa?", and she said, "Well, I'm living here for the next six weeks." I said, "Gosh, are you not even going home? Do you have enough stuff with you?" and she said, "Yes. Essentially, me and Sebastian Coe are the joint mayors of the Olympic village." I just knew that she was glorying in that amazing six weeks of tremendous sport.

A friend of mine sent me a text to say that she had been at a housing association trust, where a nervous young man had introduced Tessa as "Jessa Towell".

Tessa had just roared with laughter. My friend said that everybody in the room simply fell in love with Tessa at that moment. That is what she was—irresistible, charming and funny, but with a little bit of steel inside. She loved fashion. She could rock a frock and she liked to shop. In the end, the moments I treasure are the lifts home that she gave me, having some pretty salty conversations on the way as well.

In an era of fast food, fast politics and fast media, Tessa was a slow politician. I mean "slow" in the very best sense of the word: every word, every deed, measured out for kindness, for thoughtfulness and for compassion. Seamus Heaney wrote in "At the Wellhead":

"Being with her

Was intimate and helpful, like a cure

You didn't notice happening."

She leaves a legacy in our hearts. Rest in peace, Tessa.

4.15 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Tessa Jowell was both a very special person and a very special politician, and the qualities of one reinforced the brilliance of the other. She was the best friend that anyone could wish for: loyal, true, uplifting and empathetic. There are many people in this House and outside it who, when they found themselves at a low ebb, would know that Tessa was there for them, holding out love and support: never your judge and jury, always your friend and shelter in a storm.

She was quite simply full of love—full of love for her family, her friends, and the causes she believed in. She loved London, our great capital city. She loved it for its openness, its diversity, its endless opportunities, and its focus on tomorrow rather than yesterday. As a politician, she was a change-maker, a moderniser. Her mission was not to preserve Britain or seek illusory solace in nostalgia but to change it for the better—and always, always in a progressive direction. For her, Sure Start—the mission to give every child from whatever background the best possible start in life—was not just a Government programme but a symbol of what she believed the United Kingdom should stand for.

For the London Olympics, she not only played a vital role in winning the bid but helped to shape the character of what, for many of us, was the greatest moment of Britishness and the coming together of the country in our lifetimes. She understood more than anyone that how we hosted the games was as important as what happened in the competition itself. She gave us our golden summer. She gave the country our united golden moment.

Her love and empathy were there for the families of the victims of terrorism on 9/11 and in the 7/7 London underground bombings. There was Tessa, full of love and the desire to help—the human embodiment of the total antithesis of the hatred that had caused those people their grief.

And in her final illness, she was determined not to go quietly into that good night. She fought for better treatment for cancer sufferers and for international collaboration on how to treat the disease, and—as the Secretary of State can testify—used all her firmness and charm to ensure that Ministers backed their words of support with the very welcome new resources announced for cancer research today. She was both proud of what

she had achieved and immensely grateful for having had the opportunity to achieve it. She was thankful for the era that she lived through—the modernising movement for progressive change and social justice of which she was such a vital and brilliant part.

At a time when there is so much that divides the country, and when demonisation of others is all too readily reached for and transmitted in the world of politics, we should remember that Tessa Jowell represented the opposite of all that. Let us give thanks and remember her not only for the wonderful things that she did, but for the way that she did them, and for the many lives that she changed for the better along the way.

4.19 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Many of us walked around yesterday slightly dazed and deeply saddened by the news of Tessa's passing. She was funny, kind, strong, generous, warm and brilliant, and she was always there for any of us. She was a great support to me and, I know, to many others when we were first elected to this House, and her advice on politics and, indeed, the practicalities of being an MP was incredibly helpful.

Winning the Olympics and all that did for our country, our pride in each other and our place in the world, owed much to her vision, her passion, her integrity and her determination. It was a story of the best of our country, a story of the best of politics and a story that showed the best of Tessa. She was an inspiration, and in her final months she gave voice and comfort to those who have been suffering from brain tumours and their families, like our friends Tara and Michelle Brady, who lost their teenage daughter Addie to brain cancer just a few months ago and who will be visiting me in Parliament tomorrow. We had hoped that they would be able to meet Tessa and, had she still been here with us, she would have hoped to meet them.

We send our love to all Tessa's family. I hope that she would be as proud of how we take her legacy forward as we are of her.

4.21 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Tessa Jowell was one of the greatest entrepreneurs in public life that we have seen in this country for decades. She was such a brilliant idealist not because she could talk with people late into the night about the newest ideas or the latest trends in thinking, but because she thought that the best thing to do with ideas is turn them into action. She was a practical idealist unlike any that we have seen for many years.

She was tremendously persistent, but with that persistence came the wisdom to know that sometimes progress did not always happen in a straight line. She had one of the best political sat-navs in the business. She knew that if you hit a roadblock, that was not the end of the story. You just had to figure how you went on round it.

She had tremendous passion, but she matched that with her compassion. She knew that this business is a contact sport and that many of us are perfectly capable of self-inflicted wounds sometimes. She was never one to judge. She was always the one—the first—to ring you, to hug you, and to tell you reassuringly that it is always darkest before dawn.

Above all, though, it was her political style that many of us will remember. I was taught at the beginning of my political career that there are two kinds of politicians: those who try to divide us and those who try to make change happen by bringing us together. With the Olympics, as with so much in her life, she brought the whole world together to make progress. Sometimes we on this side of the House ask ourselves how futures are really built. Tessa Jowell provided the example, not just with her words but with her deeds.

Mr Speaker: Thank you so much.

4.23 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): For all that Tessa achieved on the national and international stage, she never forgot the local. It was as a local campaigner and politician that I first knew Tessa, when I was leader of the opposition and then of the council in Lambeth, where she was one of our fantastic local MPs. Whether it was the young people, like Solomon and his friends who set up the Brixton Soup Kitchen, or the women—it usually was women, formidable, generous women—who were running the residents associations on the estates she represented, or the parents she worked with to set up the country's first parent-promoted secondary school, the Elmgreen School in West Norwood, Tessa's love was with people and the communities they were part of.

Yesterday I spoke with Andy Troke, who for 20 years was Tessa's organiser in Dulwich and West Norwood. Andy said to me that a very important part of Tessa's legacy is that there is a little bit of Tessa in thousands of us around south London and around the country. We have been inspired by her vision, her passion, her love and her empathy, and we will take that legacy forward. As fantastic as Sure Start is and as the Olympics were, those people are Tessa's legacy.

Tessa did me the enormous honour of asking me to chair her mayoral bid—not with enormous success, it has to be said. It is funny how things work out sometimes, because instead of sitting in City Hall, she spent the past two years with her family. Who could begrudge them the precious, treasured moments that they spent together in what turned out to be her last two years?

If I may, I would like to address my final comments to Tessa's family. Thank you for sharing Tessa with us. Today, we stand with you in love and respect for this remarkable woman.

Mr Speaker: Before 2010, the current Secretary of State for Health and Social Care shadowed Tessa Jowell, and Tessa later came to shadow him, so I think it is fitting that the final words in these exchanges should go to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

4.25 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for graciously allowing a second contribution from the Government Front Bench.

Some people may wonder why a Conservative Government are so determined to mark the legacy of a Labour Cabinet Minister, but those who know, or knew, Tessa will not be surprised at all, because she had an

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

incredible gift for bringing people together and breaking down barriers in a way that was unique and inspiring. As many have said this afternoon, we saw that in London 2012, when as Culture Secretary I had the terrifying responsibility of making her dream come true—and faced with Tessa, I never dared to put a foot wrong. What an incredible success that was: real Tessa magic, bringing the whole country together.

We saw those qualities latterly, and more tragically, when almost as an aside in her final harrowing few months, she decided that the Government needed to tear up our policy on brain cancer and start again, so basically we have done so. Thanks to her, and many other campaigners from this House and outside this House, we are proud to announce today the Dame Tessa Jowell brain cancer mission, which seeks massively to increase research and improve the treatment of this most challenging of cancers. Today, the thoughts of all of us are with David, Jess and Matthew. We hope and pray that, as a result of her efforts, many more will survive this terrible disease—a final and most wonderful gift of Tessa magic to the nation.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, colleagues, for what you have said and the manner in which you have said it, which has witnessed the House at its best.

Schools That Work For Everyone

4.27 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the Schools That Work For Everyone consultation.

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): By 2020, core school funding will rise to £43.5 billion, the highest ever figure and 50% higher per pupil in real terms than in 2000. On Friday, I announced measures to create more good school places in a diverse education system, and this includes our response to the Schools That Work For Everyone consultation.

As previously announced to the House, we will not be enabling the creation of new selective schools. However, selective schools are one important part of our diverse education system, and it is right that they can expand, as other schools can, where there is need. The autumn statement in 2016 announced funding for the expansion of existing selective schools. On Friday, I launched the selective schools expansion fund for existing selective schools that commit to improving access for disadvantaged children and to working in enhanced partnership with local non-selective schools, and £50 million is available in 2018-19.

We are retaining the 50% cap on faith-based admissions in free schools. I recognise the positive role that faith providers play and that some have felt unable to establish new schools through the free schools programme. We are developing a capital scheme to support the establishment of new voluntary-aided schools. We will continue to work with universities and independent schools to encourage them to work in lasting partnerships with the state sector. Our joint understanding with the Independent Schools Council sets out how independent schools will support that. Overall, this package of reforms will help to ensure that we are delivering a diverse education system, providing choice and opportunity for all.

Angela Rayner: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.

May I start by asking the Secretary of State whether he agrees with himself? In the last Parliament, he thought grammar schools—I notice he uses the term “selective schools” now—were “not the answer” to social mobility, and he said he would not want one in his own town, as it would be “divisive”. His own Schools Minister has said:

“I never get people asking...‘Why don't you bring back the secondary modern?’. And in fact...most children would go to a secondary modern school...if we brought back selection.”

Why do they now believe it is right to spend £50 million of taxpayers' money expanding selective schools? Will the Secretary of State confirm that this is the same funding announced in the 2016 autumn statement and that £200 million is budgeted overall?

Will the Secretary of State tell us what the evidence was that convinced him that this policy works? Can he share it with us? He has not published a breakdown of responses to his consultation. Is that because he did not get the right answers?

The Secretary of State said schools will have to submit fair access and partnership plans, but what will need to be in those plans? What changes to admissions

policies will be required? Will schools continue with the 11-plus? Will he commit to publishing all the plans submitted?

Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether it remains Government policy to keep open the option of changing the tax status of independent schools, or is this another manifesto pledge abandoned? Will he confirm whether the Government are finally giving up their plan to remove the cap on faith admissions? He has committed to new voluntary-aided and free schools. How much funding will be available? How many new schools will open, and in what areas will they be?

The previous Conservative Prime Minister once said he had a simple message for Conservative Members who wanted more selective schools:

“Stop your silly class war.”

He also said:

“this is a key test for our party. Does it want to be a serious force for government, or does it want to be a right-wing debating society”.

Has the Secretary of State forgotten that advice?

Damian Hinds: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions. Selective schools, of course, include grammar schools; they also include partially selective schools. [*Interruption.*] Well, they do; that is the distinction.

The hon. Lady asked whether I agree with myself and with things I said in the past. I am happy to confirm my agreement with myself. When she says I was quoted as saying that I did not think grammar schools were the answer to social mobility, it is patently obvious that there is no one single answer to the challenge we have in this country of social mobility. However, there are many things that can play a part, and we want this type of school—existing selective schools, if they wish to expand—to do more to contribute towards social mobility.

The hon. Lady asked specifically whether the money involved was as announced at the autumn statement 2016. I believe I did cover that in my opening statement. She is right that it is £200 million over a period of time. Initially, we are talking about £50 million this year.

The hon. Lady asked what evidence we had. There are parts of the country—the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) represents part of one of them—that are performing well right across all the types of school where there is a selective school system in place. On progress measures, when we look across Progress 8, we see the gap narrowing in terms of children who are able to attend grammar schools, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this is only one part—and a relatively small part—of our overall school system, which is a diverse system.

The hon. Lady asked about independent schools, and many already do good work in partnership with the state sector. We want to see more of that, and we announced that on Friday as well. On faith schools, I cannot say exactly where they will be or how many there will be, because that depends on the faith groups and others who will sponsor voluntary-aided schools.

Overall, this package is about making sure we continue to provide good-quality school places. More than 800,000 school places have already been created since 2010. We want to make sure we carry on with that record.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I am not against grammar schools and I wish them well, but they have a poor record on social justice. Only 3% of those who go to them have free school meals and the proposals will benefit only a few thousand people. Has my right hon. Friend considered that the £200 million would be better spent on one-to-one tuition for our most vulnerable pupils, including the 33% who do not get free school meals? Some 285,000 children could be helped, through the Education Endowment Foundation, with 12 weeks one-to-one tuition for our most vulnerable children.

Damian Hinds: My right hon. Friend is of course right about the variety of interventions that are important in this area. He is also right to identify that not enough children on free school meals are able to go to these schools. I want to see that number go up, which is why we are insisting on enhanced access arrangements. I should clarify that this is capital funding—it is not the same as per pupil funding—following the creation of a place. Places will be created at all sorts of schools, the vast majority of which will be comprehensive intake—[*Interruption.*] I am not sure why the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) shakes her head. The vast majority will be comprehensive intake schools and the funding will follow in that way.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is regrettable that we are having to have this debate yet again. The grammar school the Secretary of State attended, St Ambrose in Trafford, has just 25 children on free school meals. Across the whole of Trafford, less than 2.5% of children are on free school meals. That compares with 25% in Manchester, where the attainment gap is narrower than it is in Trafford. In fact, the attainment gap for those on free school meals in Trafford is twice that in Manchester. The same pattern is true for any selective area. This is about not just the individual, but the systemic impact of these schools. What percentage of free school meals will a school need to have to access funding? What attainment gap adjustment will need to be made to the whole area for schools to receive funding?

Damian Hinds: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her questions. I totally acknowledge—I think I have already acknowledged it—the point that not enough children who are eligible for free school meals are able to attend these schools. We are trying to get that number up, which is why to bid into this capital fund schools need to come forward with a proposal for how they are going to make their admissions broader and more accessible. At a minimum, that must include priority for pupil premium recipients, ensuring outreach to specific primary schools and looking again at admissions criteria to make sure they are as broad as possible.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): What justification is there for the Secretary of State reneging on a solemn Conservative manifesto commitment, on which we all stood, to drop the totally ineffective 50% cap on faith schools? He has reneged on that commitment. He knows perfectly well that the only new free schools that will not now open are Catholic schools. Catholic schools are the most diverse, the most inclusive and the most prone to operate in deprived areas, so why has he reneged on the cap? He knows all these arguments, because he made them when he was a Back Bencher before he became

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

a Minister. He knows there will now be faith free schools all over the country, except for Catholic schools. Before he says that we are now going to open voluntary-aided schools, he is shackling us to a model that has not been encouraged for 10 years. He can give no commitment that local authorities will want to use them or that the funding will be available. This is a disgraceful announcement.

Damian Hinds: I join my hon. Friend in recognising the value of faith schools as part of our overall diverse school system. There are thousands of faith schools across the country, and they do get slightly above-average results at both primary and secondary. He specifically mentioned Catholic schools—it is true, again, that they get a slightly better set of results than the faith school average, and I totally value their contribution. I also acknowledge, as I think I did earlier, that some groups—the Catholic Education Service is chief among them—have not felt able to take part in the free schools programme because of the admissions criteria. We are very conscious of the sensitivities and the need to make sure that we promote societal inclusion, including in narrowly defined local areas. Having published the integration strategy, we have taken the decision to retain the 50% faith cap on new free schools, but it will also be possible to open voluntary-aided schools, of which there are thousands across the country. They have existed since 1944. It has always been possible to open new voluntary-aided schools—it just has not happened in recent years, because the money has not been there, but it will be possible under these proposals.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate all colleagues, but there are a lot of you, so brevity is of the essence.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The absolute tragedy is that there is more evidence available to Ministers now than there has ever been about what will improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged, so why on earth do the Government persist with targeting funding on selective education? That may theoretically benefit the pupils who attend Ilford County High School or Woodford County High School for Girls, which serve my constituency, but what will it do for every other school in my constituency, not least the schools that serve some of the most disadvantaged communities but whose buildings are in dire need of refurbishment? This statement does absolutely nothing for them, and that is the absolute tragedy of the Government's education policy: it is elitist in the wrong sense of the word.

Damian Hinds: I fear that there may be a misunderstanding. We are talking about either £200 million over a period, or £50 million over one year for selective schools expansion, but that is in the context of a much, much larger capital budget for school expansion overall of £1 billion this year, and an even bigger capital budget again, if we are talking about how we address the existing condition of schools—over a period of four years, that is something in excess of £20 billion.

Mr Speaker: Brevity will be exemplified as always by the right hon. Member for Wokingham.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I welcome the extra money to expand grammar places. Kendrick School and Reading grammar school, which serve my constituency, need to provide more places, and I hope that they take my right hon. Friend up on it. Will he confirm, however, that there will also be more money for the very good comprehensives in my area under his fairer funding?

Damian Hinds: My right hon. Friend is right to identify that where there is a demand for places and where schools are popular with parents, it makes sense to be able to expand them. I can confirm that that absolutely applies to comprehensive-intake schools, of which there are, of course, vastly more than there are selective schools.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The Government's consultation paper states that the educational benefits of attending a grammar school are twice as large for pupils on free school meals than others, but has the Secretary of State actually read the sole report that is cited in the consultation paper? It states that the advantage is "certainly not large" and that

"we should be cautious about interpreting this as a strong endorsement of grammar schools."

Does he accept that his evidence base for selective schools is itself rather selective?

Damian Hinds: I see what she did there—but no. Selective schools are part of the diverse school system that we have. We allow schools in general to expand. The vast majority, as I say, are comprehensive-intake schools. Where there is a basic need, parental demand, and when the schools commit to extending their inclusivity in very practical ways, it makes sense to allow them to expand as well.

Mr Speaker: I call the author of the standard textbook on brevity, Sir Desmond Swayne.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What argument persuaded the Secretary of State to drop the manifesto commitment on the cap for free schools?

Damian Hinds: What persuaded me was that we have to balance a number of different things. That is just a reality, as I think most right hon. and hon. Members would accept. We have just published our integration strategy, and it is right that in that context we retain the 50% faith cap on new free schools. However, there has always been a model of school—always, it never went away; it has been there since the Education Act 1944—to enable faith groups and others to do the admissions for a school if they contribute part of its capital funding. The amount used to be higher, but it is now about 10%. To be clear, never in the history of our country has there been a general route by which to open a school that is 100% state funded but for which a church group has 100% control over admissions.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that Trafford schools, both grammar and secondary, perform extremely well in our selective system, but that is despite, not because of, selection. Were it because of selection, we would see similar results in schools in selective systems around the country.

What they certainly do not do is act as engines of social mobility: of the children in grammar schools, just 6% are looked-after children, 3% are on free school meals and less than 1% have special educational needs or disabilities. What figures does he intend to require those schools to meet for each of those categories of disadvantaged children?

Damian Hinds: I share the hon. Lady's appreciation of grammar schools and high schools—and other schools indeed—in Trafford and other high-performing areas of the country. She asks what figures I will require. I will require ambitious plans, but they will be specific to individual schools and their circumstances. I want more children from deprived backgrounds to be able to take advantage of this funding.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): A free school in my constituency, the Europa School, has proved very inclusive in providing good places for children. Is this not a good example of a school that adds value to the network and provides more choice for parents and children?

Damian Hinds: The free schools programme has added enormously to diversity and innovation in our school system, which is why it is important that we continue to expand their number, through our plans for another 110 or so over the next few years.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): This has been described as new money. In areas such as mine in Wales, where we have no grammar schools—proudly—and no selection, will the Government's announcement bring a consequential that we can spend on all our children?

Damian Hinds: This is all part of existing capital funding. I mentioned earlier the much larger figure of which this is one part.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement on wave 13 of the free school application process and the fact that free schools have created 212,000 places since 2010. Applications for two new free schools, which I am keen to support, will be coming forward from my constituency. Will he meet me and a delegation to discuss those plans so that I might continue to support educational provision in my local area?

Damian Hinds: I am always delighted to meet my hon. Friend.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): How can the Secretary of State justify £50 million to increase the number of grammar school places when schools in my constituency are facing a £3 million cut?

Damian Hinds: First, our overall revenue funding for schools is increasing, not decreasing. Secondly, I fear there might be a misunderstanding: this is about the provision of new schools, not about the ongoing per-annum funding, which will follow the creation of school places, wherever that may be, including in Colne Valley and elsewhere.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): In contrast to some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I thoroughly welcome the retention of the 50% cap on faith-based submissions and the fact that it was clearly linked in my right hon. Friend's statement to the importance of integration and community cohesion. I am concerned, however, that

new voluntary-aided schools will be able to get around that rule, in return for a contribution of only 10% of the capital costs, which is about 1% of a school's whole budget on a long-run basis. How will he ensure integration and community cohesion in the new voluntary-aided schools?

Damian Hinds: Voluntary-aided schools have been around since before my hon. Friend and I were born. There are thousands of them in the country and they play an important role in local communities.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The pupil premium has been in existence for seven years now, yet the percentage of pupils in grammar schools receiving free school meals is less than 2.5% on average. What evidence is there that grammar schools play any role in social mobility or have any intention of doing so?

Damian Hinds: There are some particularly striking examples of individual schools that have gone rather further, including the Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham. We know that when children from disadvantaged backgrounds go to selective schools, they make more rapid progress. I want more children to have that opportunity.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Thomas Bennett Community College in my constituency was rebuilt in the early 2000s, but the only option was the private finance initiative, and it is now spending about a quarter of its revenue budget on servicing that loan. I appreciate that this is new capital spending, but what can be done to help schools in such a position restructure such loans?

Damian Hinds: I will be pleased to meet my hon. Friend again to discuss that situation.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Sheffield's schools are losing out in comparison with those in similar cities under the new funding formula. Money is being shifted away from primary schools, and there is simply not enough for children with special educational needs and disabilities. I shall be meeting Sheffield primary heads on Friday to discuss the crisis in their schools. Does the Secretary of State understand why they will feel that providing £200 million extra for grammar schools is simply the wrong priority?

Damian Hinds: There is no extra revenue funding for grammar schools. Let me be totally clear about this, lest there be any doubts. The revenue funding formula works in the same way for the different types of school. In fact, grammar schools will on average receive slightly less money per pupil. I do understand some of the cost pressures that schools have been under, and I am committed to redoubling efforts to work with them to bear down on some of those costs.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I welcome the measures that the Secretary of State has announced to enable children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds to gain access to selective education, but can he ensure that children on free school meals and looked-after children benefit from those measures?

Damian Hinds: Indeed I can. We owe particular attention and focus to looked-after children, and we have been discussing specifically with the Independent Schools Council what more we can do to help that cohort.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): This morning three excellent primary schools in my area, including The Spinney and Mayfield Primary School, announced that, after two years' work, they are pulling out of their plan to form a multi-academy trust because

“the recent change in education policy now makes the current educational climate too ambiguous for us to proceed”.

I am pleased that they are staying with the local authority, but does the Secretary of State really believe that ambiguity is a good way to run our school system?

Damian Hinds: I suppose that for us here in the House, managing politics, ambiguity is a daily feature. I think that converting to academy status, becoming part of an academy trust and having the opportunity to share good practice and learning across schools is a very positive action. Many thousands of schools have benefited from it, and I want more of them to make that positive choice. However, individual schools may have different criteria.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): There are many excellent faith schools in my constituency, and I believe that a third of all schools are now faith schools. They are popular with parents and achieve good results. Does my right hon. Friend agree that parental choice should be central to any successful education system?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A third of state-funded schools in the country are faith schools. That is, perhaps, a higher proportion than people tend to expect, but it is a matter of parental choice, and faith schools are very popular with some parents.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Students on free school meals in selective areas do less well than those in non-selective areas. At this time of scarce cash and difficult choices, would it not be better to support the dissemination of best practice from the non-selective areas, where we know that it works?

Damian Hinds: I do not think that it is a case of either/or. As I said earlier, we know that children from disadvantaged backgrounds who go to selective schools can make more progress, but the hon. Gentleman is also right—as he often is—to say that the dissemination of good practice, which is completely separate from the question of selective or non-selective schools, is fundamental. That is why we supported the Education Endowment Foundation, and that is why sharing that best practice is at the heart of what we do.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for saying that selective schools will have to prove that they are improving access for the most disadvantaged pupils. Will he also look into how we can make progress on the proportion of children just on the other side of the free school meals line, who have been found to be under-represented at selective schools as well?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is right, and we must look at all groups of children. The most important fundamental underlying reform is to how we measure what happens in secondary schools, and it is not possible to overstate the importance of moving to the progress measure in ensuring that the progress and performance of all children is taken fully into account.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): If we are to have more investment in grammar schools, will the right hon. Gentleman at least treat them according to the same standards as other schools? Will he start by amending the Education and Adoption Act 2016 so that if a grammar school is deemed to be coasting, it will, just like any other local authority school, be converted to an academy instantly?

Damian Hinds: Recently I was able to make an announcement on our future direction of travel on the accountability system. We must clarify it—*[Interruption.]* Yes, including that. I set out the direction of travel in my recent speech to the National Association of Head Teachers.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Recent data shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were 50% more likely to enter full-time higher education in 2017 than they were in 2009. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is testament to the strength of the Government's focus on this area, and will he assure us that this announcement will further strengthen that agenda and priority?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is right that we must redouble efforts at all stages. She is also right to identify what happens in higher education admission at age 18. The attainment gap has been narrowed by 10% at secondary and primary school, and we are redoubling efforts in the early years. Making sure we have good provision of more good school places is certainly part of that effort.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): As a south London grammar school boy, I welcome this announcement. Does the Secretary of State agree that all the evidence suggests that children from deprived backgrounds do better in grammar schools than in non-grammar schools, and that grammar schools are massively oversubscribed, and therefore that allowing them to expand meets parent choice? Does he also agree that no one is suggesting returning to the 1950s, and that today's announcement represents only 0.1% of education spending, so nobody should get too exercised about it?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend rightly identifies the importance of diversity and choice in our system. He is also right to remind us that although these are important announcements, in the scheme of things the vast majority of new places created in secondary schools are of course going to be for comprehensive-intake schools, and having this variety in our schools is a great benefit to our system.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The Secretary of State's announcement will be very welcome in Rugby, where there is huge demand for our two selective schools and our one bilateral school, and I know parents will be

very supportive of his principle of prioritisation for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, but does he agree that that objective will be assisted if every single child in our primary schools has the opportunity to be considered for a place?

Damian Hinds: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is absolutely vital that this opportunity is presented as widely as possible and to all primary schools.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that he will keep under review the removal of the cap on faith schools? I appreciate the point about integration, but was a drop to 25% considered as a compromise?

Damian Hinds: We keep all policies under review. As I said earlier, having published the integration strategy we thought very carefully about this issue and determined that the best approach was to retain the 50% cap. There are of course various other requirements on new free schools to demonstrate their inclusivity, but there are also thousands of faith schools in this country not subject to a cap, and through the voluntary-aided route it will be possible to open them.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Is the Secretary of State aware that the many comprehensive-educated Members on the Government Benches will always support any education policy that enables more children to reach their full potential? The expansion of selective schools, especially when targeted at the most disadvantaged, will achieve precisely that.

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is entirely right. We should value diversity and choice in our system. There is no single type of school that will be right for all children, and we need to find new ways of ensuring that every child can reach their potential.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): Contrary to the doom and gloom espoused by the Opposition, I welcome this announcement, which puts more money into new school places, whether selective ones such as those across the county boundary in Berkshire or new free school places in Hampshire. In doing so, may I put forward the case made by local residents in North East Hampshire for a free school in north Hampshire that will be academically rigorous but open to all?

Damian Hinds: I hear my hon. Friend's pitch and I know that it is heartfelt. We have an open process for the making of applications, and there can be mainstream and special free schools throughout the country. We want to ensure that, in particular, parts of the country that have not benefited from free schools to the same

degree in the past have the opportunity to do so, but that does not mean that any part of the country should be out of the picture.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): I always welcome more money for education funding, but the Department always focuses on expanding places when it comes to revenue and capital expenditure. Has the Secretary of State thought about areas such as mine, which have too many school places but still need capital expenditure? I am thinking about a primary school in my area that has 17 free spaces, and the impact on that primary school's budget.

Damian Hinds: There is capital money available not only for expanding places but for school condition, and there may be occasions when other moves are required for the school estate. I cannot comment in detail right now on the case that my hon. Friend has raised, but I will be happy to discuss it with him.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Speaking as a former Kentish grammar school boy, I too welcome this funding. This is one of the few occasions on which I can recall extra money being made available specifically for grammar schools. Does the Secretary of State agree that we should never aspire to a one-size-fits-all education system? Grammar schools have a crucial role to play in achieving the diversity that he speaks about, and they tend to be good or outstanding schools, so it makes absolute sense that we should allow them to flourish and expand.

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend puts it extremely well. One size does not fit all. The grammar schools in this country are a relatively small part of the overall diverse schools system.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): Amber Valley is an area with no free schools and no selective schools, and sadly attainment is lower than we would like it to be. How will my right hon. Friend's welcome suggestion of prioritising such areas work in practice? What can he do to encourage new schools into areas like that?

Damian Hinds: I am afraid there was a crucial word in my hon. Friend's question that I did not hear. He talked about prioritising something.

Nigel Mills: I asked about prioritising areas with low attainment.

Damian Hinds: Prioritising areas with low attainment is at the heart of narrowing the gap. It is what we are doing with the 12 opportunity areas around the country, for example, but it has to go far beyond that. What we are doing in the opportunity areas is partly about what happens for the areas themselves, but it is also about learning from good practice, bringing together partners in those areas and seeing what can be spread more widely throughout the system.

Points of Order

5.3 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier today, the High Court in Belfast ruled that a civil servant who had granted planning permission for an incinerator in Mallusk in County Antrim had acted beyond his powers. The specific event does not concern the House today, but there is now an implication for all decision making by civil servants in Northern Ireland. You will be aware that there has been no devolved Assembly or governance in Belfast for nearly a year and a half. On the back of this ruling, we now need certainty about how decisions can be taken forward. Have you had any indication as to whether the Secretary of State plans to make a statement to the House or whether there are, in any case, other ways in which I can pursue this fundamental constitutional question?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order which, as he knows, is not a point that I can answer now from the Chair, but I appreciate the importance of the matter that he has drawn to the House's attention. Those on the Treasury Bench will have paid attention to his important point, and it will undoubtedly be conveyed to those who have responsibility for such matters. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that if he wants to attempt to bring the appropriate Minister to the Chamber to answer questions on this topic, various routes are open to him to do so.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that you will have gathered that quite a deal of concern has been expressed by Members on both sides of the House about the general data protection regulation, which comes into full force on 25 May. Some of the training that was provided last week by another organisation on behalf of the House authorities gave MPs' staff the impression that they should be deleting all electronic information relating

to their constituency casework from before the 2017 general election. Indeed, the organisation, IT Governance, encouraged Members' staff to do so and organised for the material to be deleted.

I do not know whether this is your impression, Madam Deputy Speaker, but my anxiety is that our casework is an essential part of doing our job. Being able to remember and have a record of what representations were made for a constituent 10 or 15 years ago is important, and some cases last a long time. As for our personal security, there are times when we want to know the pattern of who has turned up to our surgeries, how often, what anxieties they had and whether their issues were addressed.

I understand that a letter has gone out from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to some Members, but not all. There is some uncertainty and a lack of clarity about what the proper advice should be, and—I notice that an inspirational piece of paper has been handed to you—I just wondered whether you might be able to provide a bit more clarity. In the end, we have to be able to do our job properly, and we cannot let silly laws get in the way.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. On his last point, there are no silly laws; there are only laws that are passed by this Parliament. Therefore, it cannot, by definition, be a silly law. However, I completely take his point about the importance of Members of this House complying with the rules while continuing to do our work for the people who live in our constituencies in an efficient and correct manner. He has made a good point.

I do not have an inspirational piece of paper, but I do have the knowledge that the House of Commons Commission is due to meet later this afternoon. I would be surprised if the Commission does not consider the hon. Gentleman's points. In fact, I am pretty sure that the Commission will consider those points shortly, and I am sure that the outcome will be that any Member who wishes further guidance on how to apply the new law will get it and that all Members will be properly helped in ensuring that they carry out their duties correctly.

Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

5.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The United Kingdom's road haulage sector plays a major role in keeping our economy on the move. Each year, UK-registered heavy goods vehicles carry around £30 billion in goods between the UK and the EU, and around 300,000 people are directly employed within the industry. I saw a snapshot of the UK logistics sector's importance this morning when I visited and opened the new United Parcel Service sorting and delivery centre at the DP World London Gateway logistics site. It is a strong and positive new investment in the sector that is helping British businesses to become more efficient and is, crucially, a vote of confidence in our future as a trading nation. The Bill is important because it is about our future as a trading nation.

The Bill provides a framework that should reassure hauliers that the final Brexit deal agreed with the European Union will be able to be implemented smoothly and will support the continued movement of goods by truck between the UK and Europe. We are committed to maintaining the existing liberalised access for commercial haulage. It is in everyone's interest that there should be a mutually beneficial road freight agreement with the EU that secures our objective of frictionless trade and is in the interest of both parties.

The Government are moving ahead with the negotiations with the EU, and I expect us to move towards a proper agreement later this year—I am very confident about that. However, it would be irresponsible of this Government not to plan for all eventualities. I stress again that it is in everyone's interest to secure liberalised access, which is by far the most probable result of the negotiations, but this Bill is prudent planning for the future. It forms part of the Government's broader EU exit legislation programme and, as set out in the other place, the haulage permits aspect of the Bill provides a framework for the UK to manage permits in all eventualities, including if they are needed as part of our agreement with the EU.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State might be putting a gloss on what is potentially a catastrophic situation. I give him the opportunity, from the Dispatch Box, to give a categorical guarantee that, after exit day, the licences of 318,000 HGV drivers will still be valid to deliver goods across the European Union. Is that right?

Chris Grayling: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman final details of the negotiations at this stage, but let me tell him some straightforward facts: 80% of the trucks that come through the channel ports and the channel tunnel are carrying EU exports to the United Kingdom, so it is pretty evident that it is in everyone's interest that we reach a sensible agreement for the future. This Bill ensures that we have the legal mechanisms in place to deliver the registration framework that is needed for all eventualities, which is prudent and sensible.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a straightforward question, and I say to him straightforwardly that 80% of those trucks are EU hauliers bringing goods to the UK. I struggle to imagine other EU countries not wanting that to continue.

Mr Leslie: I am sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State, but this is quite important. He acknowledges that I asked a straight question about the guarantee. Is it not the case that, even in that worst-case situation, some sort of bilateral agreement with other EU countries would be required and there is no guarantee that such an agreement will come forward? Is that not the truth?

Chris Grayling: I cannot guarantee that EU countries and their businesses will want to continue selling goods to UK consumers, but my best guess is that French farmers will still want to sell their produce through our supermarkets and that German car makers will still want to sell their cars in our car showrooms. No, I cannot guarantee that it will rain or be sunny tomorrow, nor can I guarantee that EU countries will want to continue selling their products to us, but do you know what, I think they probably will.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on introducing a timely and good Bill to deal with all eventualities, and on so politely answering idiotic interventions that are trying to create fear where there is no need for it because, of course, goods will move smoothly with or without a deal.

Chris Grayling: My right hon. Friend is right. The fact that this morning, just to the east of London, I visited a £120 million investment in the future of the United Kingdom as a trading nation by a major United States-based company says that I am not alone in believing that trade will continue and flourish in the future, because it will.

There are two parts to the Bill, the first of which is all about the permits. It enables us to introduce a scheme that simply allows trucks to cross borders in a variety of scenarios—this is, basically, like a truck having its own international driving licence. In many circumstances, through a variety of international agreements, that is a necessity in order to carry goods from one nation to another. We are simply making sure that we put in place the legal framework for the Government to establish a system for issuing permits if, after we have concluded the negotiations, it proves necessary to do so. We have designed the legislation to be flexible in response to different circumstances. We do not want to place any undue regulatory or financial requirements on the industry.

Permits are a feature of almost all international road freight agreements outside free-trade areas. The UK already has several permit-based agreements with non-EU countries, including Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Russia, Tunisia and Ukraine. The UK also has liberal, non-permit agreements with Albania and Turkey. The Bill will also cover non-EU agreements relating to permits, which means that there will be one simple, straightforward administration system that is designed to be as easy as possible for haulage firms to use.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I, too, welcome the Bill. The Government are right to make it clear that in the event of no deal we will still have made preparations.

[Sammy Wilson]

The Bill makes a distinction between international permits with other EU countries, and permits and agreements with the Irish Republic. Why is such a distinction made?

Chris Grayling: We worked on this carefully. The important thing to say is that this is not in any way related to broader discussions about border matters. We are aware that some hauliers travel from Belfast to Dublin to Holyhead to deliver their goods within the UK—we are talking about a UK business delivering its produce within the UK—so this provision is simply designed to ensure that that will not be impeded in any way by the regulatory system. I will say a bit more about that later in my remarks, but we want to ensure that nothing can undermine the integrity of the UK and people who travel from point A to point B within it. That is very important to me.

The final details of the scheme will, of course, depend on the agreements that we reach, and the Bill allows for that. It creates flexibility and allows us to make regulations on the allocation of permits to best meet the needs of the economy. Guidance on the allocation process will be issued to hauliers.

This aspect of the Bill also allows the Government to charge fees in relation to applications for permits and the grant of permits. I stress that our aim is purely to set those fees on a cost-recovery basis so that we minimise the impact on hauliers; this is not designed to be a revenue-raising mechanism. The system is simply designed to cover its own costs, and the amounts involved will be relatively small for anyone seeking a permit. The fees will recover only the day-to-day cost of administering the scheme. The set-up costs of the scheme are being funded as part of a £75.8 million grant from the Treasury to the Department for Transport as part of our preparations for all the different Brexit scenarios.

The Bill provides for the first set of regulations made under clauses 1 and 2 to be subject to the affirmative procedure, which means that the House will be able to scrutinise the new permitting system fully and properly. The first regulations will set out the overarching framework that will be used for the provision of permits under any future agreements. As I have outlined, we are confident that we can maintain our existing liberalised access with the EU, but the Bill will help to cater for any possible future permit arrangement with the EU.

On timing, we plan to have the system for a permit scheme ready by the end of the year. It is important that we make sure that we are prepared for all eventualities. Any applications for permits after the relevant regulations are in force will be dealt with under this system. The first regulations made under clauses 1 and 2 will cover the permits required under existing international agreements, including provisions relating to Armenia and Ukraine. If we then agree a permit-based arrangement with the EU, we will make further changes to the regulations to cover the agreement reached. In the unlikely scenario that we end up with a restricted number of permits to the EU as part of a future relationship, we have committed to providing a report to Parliament. That report must assess the effects of such restrictions on the UK haulage industry during that year. That assessment is, of course, vital, but I reiterate that this is about a flow that is more inward than outward, both in goods terms and in haulage terms, so I remain confident that we will reach

a sensible agreement for the future. The permit scheme is necessary to make sure that trucks have their equivalent of the international driving licence to cross borders. I will not allow us to get into a position in which the industry does not have the administrative basis to take its business forward in all eventualities.

Before I move on to part 2 of the Bill, let me touch briefly on the 1968 Vienna convention on road traffic, which the UK signed 50 years ago and which the Government have recently ratified. The convention will come into force here before 29 March 2019. It was introduced by the United Nations to enable international road travel and to increase safety by establishing common rules for roads around the world. It builds on the earlier 1949 Geneva convention on road traffic and, indeed, the 1926 Paris convention, which was the first in this policy area and which the UK has already ratified. Why does it matter? Because we need to make sure not only that trucks can come across borders, but that we are able to line up with the rules in other countries, such as Germany, on trailer registration.

The second part of the Bill gives the Government powers to establish a trailer registration scheme to meet the standards in the 1968 Vienna convention. Many EU countries have similar schemes. It will mean that UK operators will be able to register trailers before entering countries that require trailer registration for travel on their roads. By trailers, I mean not the trailer on the back of a car that carries a tent, but full HGV trailers that cross borders to carry goods from point A to point B. The Bill will allow us to set the scope of such a scheme's coverage.

The detail will be set out in regulations, but our intention is to require only users travelling abroad to register their trailers. It is not UK-only, but purely about those travelling internationally. Only commercial trailers weighing more than 750 kg and all trailers weighing more than 3.5 tonnes will need to be registered. As was clearly set out in the other House, the duty to register will apply almost exclusively to international hauliers. Virtually all private-use trailers, such as caravans and horse trailers, will not fall within the scope of mandatory registration, because it is rare that trailers of that kind weigh more than 3.5 tonnes.

We will consult on the scope of the trailer registration scheme over the next few months, and we will try to make sure that we are in good shape later this year to put in place the right scheme, depending on the nature of our agreements and what is required to ensure the smooth flow of trade across borders. We plan to recover the costs of running the scheme by charging fees, which we expect to be lower than those currently set out for the registration of motor vehicles. It is of course important that the new arrangements are complied with; if they are not, we will apply existing penalties to those who transgress.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Many hauliers hire trailers for specific uses. If trailers are used predominantly in the UK, they obviously will not be registered. What sort of timescale does the Secretary of State think would be reasonable for registering a trailer before it embarks on an international journey?

Chris Grayling: In all this, we will want the process to be as rapid as possible. There will inevitably be a surge at the start when hauliers look to register trailers that

will be used internationally, but my hope is that once that initial surge is over, it will be possible to carry out the registration very quickly when there is a change of circumstance. We do not expect to have a system that is so expensive that it deters somebody who wants to register a trailer in case it is used internationally. We want to ensure that there is only a small cost to businesses. Many people will want to register their trailers in case what my right hon. Friend highlights happens.

We listened carefully to the debate in the other place and we are working on a report on trailer safety, which is a policy area in which proper analysis will be beneficial and will help safety on our roads. Off the back of the report, we will be able to offer a clear and comprehensive analysis of the complex issue of trailer safety and towing-related accidents. That was a constructive element that came out of the debate in the other place, and we will certainly engage with it.

On the question of the island of Ireland, the Bill covers the whole United Kingdom, other than two provisions that amend legislation in Great Britain and Northern Ireland respectively. Road haulage policy and trailer registration are devolved in Northern Ireland, but not in Scotland and Wales. We have been working with all the devolved Administrations as the Bill has developed. With regard to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the Bill supports the commitments made in the December 2017 joint report to avoid a hard land border. This is an enabling Bill, and the Government will preserve the constitutional and economic integrity of the United Kingdom.

The Government are committed to ensuring that trade and everyday movements over the land border continue as they do now. The Bill does not create a permit regime in relation to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, nor does it create a hard border between them. It means that trailers travelling only between the UK and Ireland will not need to be registered. It also avoids the situation that I described earlier in which someone who chooses to go via Dublin to come over to the UK finds themselves needing a permit even if they are moving purely within the United Kingdom. I can confirm that the Bill will not impact on border arrangements and that there will not be, as a result, any new transport-related checks at our borders.

Sammy Wilson: Will the Secretary of State clarify whether there will have to be a separate agreement between the UK Government and the Irish Government covering people who are taking lorries across the border, whether through Ireland to the rest of GB, or simply carrying loads from Northern Ireland into the Irish Republic?

Chris Grayling: The right hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot speak for the Irish Government. We are putting in place a mechanism that ensures that there is no issue on our part. The Irish Government, like any other Government, are of course perfectly able to put barriers in the way of trade, but we will not do that. We will not create a regime that affects those travelling into the Republic of Ireland or those travelling through the Republic of Ireland into the United Kingdom. I cannot give guarantees on behalf of the Republic of Ireland, but I cannot for a moment believe that people there will want to put in place administrative systems that we do not put in place.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I understand that the Secretary of State cannot speak for the Irish Government, but can he tell us what discussions he has had with the Irish Government about this, and therefore give us an indication of what the position might be?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Irish Government are part of the European Union negotiations. We continue to discuss this and other transport issues as part of those negotiations, and I am entirely confident that we will reach a sensible place at their conclusion.

Let me sum up. As I have outlined, we are committed to ensuring that the road haulage industry can continue to prosper as we leave the European Union. As part of our programme of EU exit legislation, this Bill prepares us for a range of scenarios. It will ensure that the UK can fulfil its international obligations and will be ready when we leave the EU.

The Government have been supported by the industry in bringing forward these sensible measures, and we have talked extensively with it over the past few months. I believe that this represents prudent planning for different eventualities. I personally want to lead a Department that is prepared for all those eventualities and that can deal with whatever circumstance lies ahead, notwithstanding my view that we will reach a sensible partnership agreement for the future this autumn that will enable us to remain good friends and neighbours of the European Union, and that will allow the trade between us to carry on flowing as it does today. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.27 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): The Bill presents a long overdue opportunity to consider the importance of the transport and logistics industries to the United Kingdom and the commercial road haulage sector in particular. The industry employs more than 2.5 million people and is the fifth biggest sector of the economy contributing £124 billion.

One of the privileges of my job is to meet people from across the transport, freight and logistics sectors. In the course of those discussions around transitional and post-Brexit arrangements, I hear an increasing frustration and anger at the cavalier “it will be all right on the night” approach from this Government, and rightly so, because there is no evidence that economic self-interest will prevail.

As we debate the prospect of a permit system for the haulage industry in the event of a no-deal Brexit, it should be recalled that the UK has 600,000 goods vehicle driving licence holders. There are nearly half a million commercial vehicles over 3.5 tonnes registered in the UK, which are responsible for moving 98% of goods. This is a serious and vital industry and we meddle with it at our peril.

Sammy Wilson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the haulage industry is important to the United Kingdom, especially to Northern Ireland where almost all of our food and goods travel by road? Does he not accept that the whole purpose of the Bill is to ensure that, if there is a deal, we are prepared for it, and if there is no deal, we are also prepared for it, and that that should reassure the haulage industry?

Andy McDonald: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I just do not share his sense of confidence that the provisions of the Bill are anything like adequate in the event of a no deal. These measures will not respond to the needs of the country should that contingency arise.

The Bill must be regarded as the first piece of legislation that provides for a no-deal Brexit. It sets out new powers for the Government to allocate permits to hauliers if required by future agreement or lack thereof, so that UK lorries can continue to operate to and within the European Union. A newspaper headline this weekend—in *The Sunday Times*, no less—was correct to say that “this government is failing business at every turn”.

Today’s debate is a further foretaste of the damage that this Government’s prevaricating is doing to the British economy.

Mr Leslie: My hon. Friend will have noticed that the Secretary of State—in all his finger-crossing hopes for something to crop up before Brexit day—did not actually update the House on the progress that he might be making towards a comprehensive land transport agreement, which is what the Freight Transport Association is asking for. The Secretary of State did not confirm whether he is personally in discussions with the Irish Government, other Governments or the European Commission. Is it not lamentable that he could not even give this vital industry some level of update on the progress of negotiations towards those agreements?

Andy McDonald: My hon. Friend has got it absolutely right. It is indeed lamentable that there has been a complete absence of those discussions. It is a question of hit and hope, finger in the air and everything will be alright on the night. This is not the right way to go about it. The Secretary of State has come to the Dispatch Box and said that he does not speak for the other 27 Governments. I sometimes wonder whether he speaks for the one of which he is a member. A damaged and disrupted logistics sector will result in a damaged and disrupted British economy.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman just tell the House what additional contingencies he would make if he were the Secretary of State?

Andy McDonald: If the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue, that is exactly what I am going to outline during the course of my speech.

I hope that this Bill represents the dawn of the realisation of the catastrophe that would flow from a chaotic Brexit. A few months ago the “beast from the east” left supermarket shelves across the country empty, while logistics problems forced fast food chain KFC to close hundreds of outlets because of supply shortages. These examples provide the merest glimpse of what shocks to the supply and distribution chain will look like for British consumers and businesses if the free flow of trade is not maintained following our departure from the European Union.

The Bill has serious implications for the UK’s music industry, particularly the concert haulage industry, which supports the music industry in the UK and the EU. Concert haulage operators require a community licence for road transport to the EU, which will be lost after Brexit.

The Road Haulage Association says that a permit system will not work for concert hauliers, and estimates that the UK will run out of permits in 2.5 days. I have to ask: when will the Government listen to business and accept that there has to be a continuation of the current trading and transport environment, if a massive disruption of the flow of goods and produce is to be avoided?

As an island nation, ports are and will remain vital to our trading relationship with Europe and the rest of the world, so it is quite extraordinary that no Minister from the Department for Exiting the European Union has visited Britain’s most important gateway to Europe—the port of Dover. Half of the UK’s international road haulage traffic comes through Dover alone. I ask the Minister, is transport really a top priority in the Government’s Brexit negotiations?

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Forgive me; I did not mean to interrupt the hon. Gentleman in mid-flow, but I think that I am right in saying that the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman), visited Dover last week. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a straightforward Member of this House and would not want to mislead the House, so he will probably want to correct what he said. I say this to be helpful.

Andy McDonald: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that point. I am just delighted that the hon. Lady got there eventually.

Road haulage is essential to the complex and sensitive just-in-time supply chains that underpin the UK and EU economies. Roll-on roll-off ferries face the most serious impact from a no-deal Brexit. A staggering 10,000 trucks pass through Dover each day. Almost none of these currently requires a customs clearance process. The port estimates that a two-minute delay per vehicle will generate a permanent 20-mile-long traffic jam.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Given the current snail’s pace in the negotiations, with the Cabinet split in two to look for solutions rather than no solutions, should there not have been some contingency in this Bill for customs checks, which are looking increasingly likely due to the Government’s handling of Brexit?

Andy McDonald: My hon. Friend makes a good point. One does wonder why no such contingency has been put in the Bill, and we will have to address that in Committee.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders tells me that, on average, 1,100 trucks from the EU deliver components worth £35 million to UK car and engine plants every single day. The UK automotive industry relies on just six major ports for the export of 95% of completed vehicles. The SMMT says that some manufacturers face costs of up to £1 million an hour if production is stopped due to component supply issues. A 15-minute delay to parts delivered just in time can cost manufacturers £850,000 per year. Is it not blindingly obvious that the current trajectory of this Government, with Brextremists at their core, means that we are heading for economic and trading chaos?

Chris Grayling: May I ask the hon. Gentleman a simple question? If business shares the pessimism that he is laying before the House, can he explain the string of positive announcements of investment in the United Kingdom that we have seen in the past few months by Vauxhall, Toyota and others? If things are so bleak, why are they choosing to make substantial investments in their future in the United Kingdom?

Andy McDonald: If the Secretary of State had looked at the papers over the weekend, he would have seen exactly why. A lot of people are making their plans to get out of the UK if necessary. That is exactly what has happened. He is playing with fire on this, and he really should wake up and smell the coffee.

The Government have done little to help the road haulage industry. They have made a complete and utter dog's breakfast of contingency planning for the M20 motorway. A lorry park off the motorway has been desperately needed to help alleviate problems during Operation Stack, and it is all the more needed ahead of Brexit next March. Yet the Department for Transport failed properly to undertake the critically important environmental risk assessment before the planning process for the £250 million project and had to scrap it last September. This incompetence will have disastrous consequences. If this Government cannot successfully plan how to build a lorry park in Kent, how do they expect anyone to believe that they are capable of introducing an alternative haulage permit scheme?

Mr Goodwill: The hon. Gentleman says, rather surprisingly, that this Government have done nothing for the road haulage industry. Is he not aware that the HGV levy brought in to level the playing field between foreign and UK hauliers brought in £96 million in the first two years after it was introduced in 2014, and that the previous coalition Government increased the speed limit on single-carriageway roads from 40 mph to 50 mph, which made a great contribution to improving logistical efficiency?

Andy McDonald: If the right hon. Gentleman had had the pleasure of listening to the Road Haulage Association last week, and the FTA as well, he would probably agree with me that they are not exactly overjoyed by the prospect of the uncertainty that is facing them. A lot of these companies are small companies working on very small margins. He raised the issue of costs that are now going to be put on to those companies. He should be worrying about how that is going to impact on them.

Mr Goodwill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy McDonald: No. I am not trying to be rude, but I need to make progress. I have taken a lot of interventions.

The ongoing supply of labour is a huge concern for the road haulage industry. The average age of an HGV driver is now 55 and only 2% of the workforce is under 25. The industry is enormously reliant on the 60,000 non-UK EU nationals and any restriction on the supply of skilled workers will undoubtedly have a negative impact.

Ministers urgently need to reassure the road haulage industry that Brexit will not result in more delays at borders as well as that it will not have to bear additional red tape and costs. The Government need urgently to provide clarity about customs, borders and future regulations,

about which there are real and deep concerns. Ministers continually argue that economic self-interest will mean that things naturally gravitate towards protecting British business. That is a naive and irresponsible view that is already damaging UK industry.

I pay tribute to the noble Lords, whose work has improved the Bill. The Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee in the Lords described the Bill as “wholly skeletal, more of a mission statement than legislation”, said that the Committee was

“in the dark because the devil will be in the regulatory detail”,

and urged the Government to provide

“illustrative examples...of at least some of the regulations to be made under the main delegated powers in the Bill”.

As the future relationship is a matter for the Brexit negotiations, this is an enabling Bill that contains little detail and grants the Secretary of State significant powers. The fact that so few details are on the face of the Bill also speaks to the lack of strategy and progress in the Government's approach to exiting the European Union. The Secretary of State should of course have the powers needed to mitigate the damage to the UK haulage sector caused by a failure to retain current arrangements, but those powers should not be excessive. For example, an argument has been made in favour of a sunset clause so that the powers do not remain on the statute book ad infinitum.

Following pressure in the other place, concessions were made. I am glad that clauses 1, 2, 12 and 17 will be subject to the affirmative procedure, taking account of the recommendations of the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee to the effect that regulations made under certain clauses should be subject to a vote of both Houses. I am pleased that the Government tabled an amendment introducing a new reporting requirement, requiring the Secretary of State to lay a report before Parliament annually that assesses the effect on the UK haulage industry of any restrictions that apply to a permit scheme agreed with one or more EU member states. The impact of a future permit scheme has the potential to be far reaching with many unintended consequences, so it is right that the Secretary of State should report to Parliament.

In the light of the Government's abysmal failure on road safety, which has seen the number of specialised road traffic police plummet while the number killed and seriously injured on our roads rises year on year, I urge the Secretary of State not to attempt to remove Labour's amendment on trailer safety. The amendment is eminently reasonable, and requires the Government to assess evidence on the incidence of trailer-related road accidents and, only if the evidence justifies action, for a new MOT-style mandatory safety standards testing scheme to be created.

I note that when it was introduced in the other place the Bill would have allowed for permits to be allocated on a first come, first served basis or through a lottery, creating a situation where companies would be left queuing overnight or waiting with their fingers crossed that their company's name would be pulled out of a hat. I am glad that, after criticism from the noble Lord Tunncliffe, this was changed.

In Committee, Labour will continue to identify any further unintended consequences of the Bill, and will look to strengthen the accountability to Parliament and restrict the powers granted to the Secretary of

[*Andy McDonald*]

State where necessary. Labour believes that getting the right deal for transport and its networks must be the highest priority for the Brexit negotiations. Nothing less than the future of the country is at stake. Only Labour's clear policy of a customs union with the EU can ensure that trade can flow and grow. The Government should put country before party and provide the same.

5.44 pm

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): I am slightly astonished at some of the points that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (*Andy McDonald*) made on behalf of the Opposition. I know him well—we often travel down on the train from the north-east together—but he has spent most of the past quarter of an hour attacking the Government for implementing the decision made by 65.5% of the voters in Middlesbrough, and by over 60% of people in Cleveland as a whole, to leave the European Union.

Andy McDonald: Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree with me that the voters did not vote to be worse off?

Mr Goodwill: The hon. Gentleman has fallen into the other trap that many Labour colleagues fall into, which is arguing that the people were too stupid to understand what they were voting for. They knew precisely what they were voting for. They knew it would be tough, but they put the interests of the country before short-term economic advantage. I believe that the Government are negotiating to get the best deal for Britain and one that will be to the long-term benefit of our country.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my surprise at hearing the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (*Andy McDonald*) say that any attempt to restrict the supply of workers coming in from the EU would be resisted? Labour Members' support for a customs union and their not wanting any restriction on the freedom of movement of workers shows that they are in denial about leaving the European Union.

Mr Goodwill: My hon. Friend has correctly identified that Labour Members are all over the place on this subject. There was no shortage of "Project Fear" in debates during the referendum campaign—people knew they were voting for something that would be very tough for this country—but, by and large, they voted because they understood the facts. I turn again to the point that Labour colleagues often make, which is that people did not know what they were voting for. Yes, they did: they were intelligent enough to understand the arguments, and to say otherwise is to insult the many people in Yorkshire and the north-east who voted to leave the European Union.

John Redwood: Did my right hon. Friend also notice that Labour Members' case seems to be that the EU is so nasty and unpleasant that it would deliberately wreck its own exports to us to make a point, yet they want to be more closely aligned with people and an organisation that would do that? I just do not understand what they are talking about.

Mr Goodwill: As always, my right hon. Friend makes a valid point. It is not in the interests of the German motor industry, the French agriculture industry or industry

right across Europe to cut off its nose to spite its face. If that were the case, I am sure that German motor manufacturers would be beating a track to Chancellor Merkel's door to make that very point.

I have not seen one recently, but I remember following lorries down the road and reading a sticker saying, "If you've got it, it's been on a truck". Although progress has been made in switching freight to rail or short sea shipping, the last leg of any journey invariably involves a truck. We heard from the hon. Member for Middlesbrough about Dover. It had 2.6 million truck journeys last year, with 1.6 million trucks going on Le Shuttle, which is 11,500 per day. Dover represents 17% of all UK trade coming in, worth £122 billion last year.

It is not just on this side of the channel that people are making such a case; Calais chiefs have also stressed the necessity of a frictionless border. Jean-Marc Puissesseau, president and general manager of Port Boulogne Calais, has said that the port boarded 2 million lorries last year. Without an agreed system in place, we could face 30-mile queues on both sides of the channel—every day, not just when the French seamen go on strike. During such a strike, some UK motor manufacturers, and indeed BMW in Bavaria, were three days away from stopping production. As we have heard, Honda relies on 350 trucks a day on a one-hour just-in-time delivery schedule. It is in no one's interest not to get a deal.

Sammy Wilson: The right hon. Gentleman is making his point very sharply and well. Does he accept that even the permanent secretary of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has made it quite clear that the picture painted by the Opposition spokesman is very far from the truth? We can have a frictionless border at Dover, and not need have a lorry park on the M20 or the checks he described.

Mr Goodwill: I will come to that point as I expand my comments.

Turning to trucks and the importance of the road haulage industry, it is currently in vogue to demonise diesels, and Volkswagen must take some of the blame for that. However, if one looks at the trucks operating under the Euro 5 and Euro 6 regulations, one sees that heavy vehicles pretty much perform as expected. The reason for that is quite simple: although the analytical equipment that exposed Volkswagen was not previously small enough to go in a car boot, it has for a long time been small enough to go on the back of a truck, so trucks actually comply very well with the regulations. Indeed, industries have always stepped up to the mark when a higher level of regulation has been proposed, and there is no reason whatever why the regulations will be slackened once the UK leaves the European Union.

As one of the few Members, I suspect, who holds what used to be called a class 1 heavy goods vehicle licence, I spent many hours driving HGVs—transporting potatoes to make oven chips or, as part of the family business, transporting sulphuric acid. I have also driven 44-tonners in France, Belgium, Germany and Holland, so I know a bit about their haulage system—indeed, I wish we had motorway service stations as good as theirs. We rely on our haulage companies, our 320,000 drivers and our logistical organisations to literally keep the wheels of business turning, and they are equally important in cross-border trade.

The Bill could be described in part as a just-in-case Bill—a safety net in case the Brexit negotiations fall off the trapeze—although the permits will also be useful in how they apply to non-EU states. It is unlikely that we will not get a deal, because I think we all understand that it is in everyone’s interest to get a good deal in place for the other side of Brexit.

International trade relies on the capability of vehicles, as well as the goods they carry, to cross international borders. To ensure that vehicles minimise empty running, logistical operations need to be flexible. That is why we have cabotage rules in place, so that non-EU trucks can carry out work here before returning, hopefully loaded with exports, to their home country. When there are short-term capacity problems, the rules can be lifted temporarily, as was the case when a shortage of car transporters coincided with the new registration plate.

The single market for transport services is one baby that we must not throw out with the Brexit bathwater. Yes, we are leaving the single market, but we must keep the flexibilities, liberalisation and competitive elements that benefit trade and jobs. We have always promoted this mechanism, often in the teeth of opposition from member states such as France that see competition from eastern European hauliers as “social dumping” rather than as a competitive element that raises everyone’s game.

In the absence of an agreement, the Bill is our fall-back plan B. In a post-Brexit scenario, one expects the standards that our haulage industry has to comply with not to change radically. Vehicle safety and emissions standards will not be eroded when the UK leaves the EU. Innovations such as autonomous automatic braking, selective catalytic reduction and particulate traps apply to vehicles manufactured and used in Europe. I expect that the Euro 6 standards will be identical to the new UK 1 standards, as I guess they will be called, after Brexit. Similarly, it is in no one’s interest to start a race to the bottom on drivers’ hours.

So much for the vehicles. What about the goods they carry? Whether we have a customs partnership, a so-called max fac or some other custom-built customs solution, the system must operate electronically and without friction, and it must not delay vehicles passing through Dover, Holyhead or Newry, or indeed—this is probably our biggest challenge—goods passing from Spain to our loyal friends in Gibraltar.

I do not share the pessimism of some people who have been known as roaners—incidentally, I was one of those who voted remain. As Shipping Minister, I visited Southampton and Felixstowe and saw the thousands of containers coming in from all over the world and moving seamlessly through the port. The last thing anyone wants to do is to start opening those containers. The same applies to our biggest port by value—surprisingly, not many people know that that is Heathrow, with the holds of long-haul flights laden with goods inbound and outbound to places all over the globe.

Perhaps the most impressive operation I have seen as part of the Industry and Parliament Trust involved Manchester Airports Group and UPS. The hub at East Midlands airport deals with thousands of parcels every night. Customs duty is collected by the shipper, who navigates a complex administrative system, without the parcel—whether from Beijing, Detroit or Tokyo—stopping for a moment, either on its journey to a UK destination

or on its way to trans-shipment on a departing flight. Using the widely recognised “known shipper” arrangement enables truly global trade to function between dozens of jurisdictions and with myriad permutations. For example, some hydraulic components attract a different tariff depending on whether they are destined to be fitted to a tractor or an aircraft. East Midlands is impressive, but nothing compared with the operations in Cologne or Louisville, Kentucky. As I say, this system is already delivering frictionless trade every night. We do not need to reinvent the wheel—or indeed the hub.

I hope such arrangements can be put in place before the end of the transition period. I agree with James Hookham of the Freight Transport Association that the timetable is tight. Until this issue is resolved, however, it will not be possible to initiate free trade, or a freer trade arrangement, with our new global trading partners, so time is of the essence.

Turning to trailers, I note that the UK has now ratified the Vienna convention, which will come into force in March 2019. There have been problems with UK trailers and semi-trailers pulled by non-UK motive units on the continent. The proposals to register trailers will address that. I am pleased that that will not apply to the whole fleet—I must declare an interest in this respect—but only to existing trailers used internationally, and to new trailers as they are registered. I also note the need to facilitate trailer rental, and I am pleased by the reassurance I received from the Secretary of State earlier. We already have a registration system with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, as trailers must pass an annual MOT test, so the Department for Transport will be well aware of the scale of the operation needed.

Belgium—I think uniquely—has a separate registration number for trailers, so the number on the front of a combination will not match the one on the back. Most countries, like us, however, have a plate in the cab that is fixed to whichever trailer is being pulled. The current plating certificate—affixed to the chassis bar of a trailer in most cases—is often hard to find and usually hard to read as well. Has the Minister considered whether the plate fitted to the trailer could have a number or barcode, as is used on shipping containers, that could be read by an automatic number plate recognition-type machine to further facilitate the free flow of vehicles between jurisdictions? I understand that the plate must be fixed to the vehicle, but is there a view on the best position for remote sensing?

In conclusion, I welcome the Bill, but I hope that progress in negotiations will render it superfluous. When we take out insurance, that does not mean that we expect our house to burn down. I think the Government are being prudent. Incidentally, I think the Bill also sends a clear message to EU negotiators that we will not accept a bad deal at all costs and that contingencies are being put in place.

5.57 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), who must be one of the very few of us in this place to have a class 1 licence.

I think I will continue the theme of Opposition Members expressing their genuine concerns about what is happening and about how we go forward, while Conservative Members

[Alan Brown]

just continue to tell us, “Everything will be all right on the night. Why should we worry? Just believe us. It will all be okay.” The Government’s confidence is indicated by the fact that a Parliamentary Private Secretary has been going round the Government Benches giving out a crib sheet and lobbying for support. I think that tells us how confident the Government really feel.

I understand the need for the Bill, which is a back-up in case there is no deal. For that reason, I certainly would not vote against it, but I hope that the UK Government are doing their best to ensure that part 1 is not required and that the existing streamlined operations we enjoy under the Community licence scheme remain in place. However, we have to look at the current reality. We have a Brexit Cabinet that cannot agree a customs arrangement. The Tories are determined to pull out of the customs union and the single market. They are absolutely all over the place, and the clock is ticking away, so the prospect of a seamless transition becomes more and more unlikely.

In many ways, the Bill is symptomatic of the Government and their approach to Brexit. It is mainly superficial. There is a statement of intent, but we do not know the detail behind the Bill. We do not know what the permit system will look like or how it will operate. We do not know what fees will be applied. We do not even know whether limits will be applied to the number of permits. Like the Brexit process in general, the Bill is just the equivalent of talk but no action.

There is a further irony. The Bill is another example of primary legislation formulated in the other place. When it suits the UK Government they tell us that the House of Lords is only a revising chamber and that it should not get in the way of the business of the Government, yet if it is willing to do the Government’s bidding, we are supposed to laud its expertise. However, when it applies its expertise and says there is a need for a customs union, a vote to stay in the single market and a meaningful parliamentary vote in this place, somehow we have to ignore that expertise and wisdom. That shows the hypocrisy of Government Members when it comes to the House of Lords.

Another aspect of the Bill is that it is a part of the no deal preparations. The Brexiteer argument is that preparing for no deal will show the EU we are ready to walk away, thus strengthening our negotiating position. However, I am pretty sure that the Bill is not going to have Michel Barnier quaking in his boots. This is the first Bill going through Parliament in preparation for no deal. I suggest there is a long way to go to strengthen the Government’s hand. We are only a couple of months away from summer recess and a whole load of other legislation will be required for the Government to be in a competent place in terms of no deal arrangements. There is no way that the Government are strengthening their hand. If anybody thinks that we are in a stronger negotiating position, they are kidding themselves.

The Government have not even published their transport priorities in a single policy or place, so we do not really know their overall hoped for direction of travel. We know in theory that they want frictionless trade. They want extensive free trade agreements without any meaningful show of what that means in reality and how it would be implemented—that is a key issue.

On haulage, we know that the supposed preference is for things to remain much as they are under the Community licence arrangements, but where are we on those negotiations? If agreement is reached for arrangements to continue as is, or if a reciprocal licence arrangement is agreed, that means few extra checks will be required. There is still, however, the fundamental issue of the customs and border arrangements, which is far more relevant to hauliers and businesses reliant on the import and export of fresh goods.

What will be the timescale for a new IT system? Has any work actually started on it? How much of the £75.8 million allocation for transport Brexit preparation has been spent so far and what has it been spent on? What is the planned programme of work for the fund for the rest of the financial year? Is the renting of Manston airfield as an emergency lorry park part of the Brexit preparations and expenditure? As the shadow Minister said, they cannot even get their plans for a car park correctly in place. That is £13 million down the drain.

Chris Grayling: It may be helpful to the House if I say that the preparations for any disruption, not necessarily Brexit-related, of the Channel ports are well under way. Work on the M20 will begin in a matter of weeks, either late this month or early next month, to ensure that we have greater capability than we did in 2015 to store more lorries. We are not relying on Manston airport. It remains available to us in the short term, but it is not included in our long-term plans.

Alan Brown: The Transport Secretary says that the work is going to start shortly. Can he give me a timescale for the completion of the lorry park?

Chris Grayling: I will go into detail another time, but we are putting in place plans that will enable us to store at least as many lorries as we did at the worst of the situation in 2015 without creating a situation where the motorway cannot flow in both directions. Those plans are well advanced and we will have them in place before next March.

Alan Brown: I remain to be convinced. That seems to be another example of, “Believe me, it will be okay. We’re dealing with it, just trust me.”

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I just wonder if perhaps this is the hidden agenda behind the Foreign Secretary’s proposed bridge, because that would create 20 miles of road between Britain and France. Perhaps the lorries could be stacked along that as well.

Alan Brown: It would certainly provide additional space. I wonder how long the bridge would take to complete, right enough. It is something else I would not trust this Government to implement.

On the Government’s overall preparations, the reality is, as James Hookham, the deputy chief executive of the Freight Transport Association stated:

“There is a lack of any progress in agreeing new systems for avoiding customs checks.”

He also explained that there is much detail to be agreed in two and a half years, a tiny period in business terms. His comments assume a transition period up to December 2020.

If there is no deal, however, the transition period falls and that takes a year and a half out of that timetable. Time really is ticking on and we do not get a sense of urgency from the Government.

Our reliance on road haulage is confirmed by the fact that in 2016 3.7 million tonnes of goods were exported from the UK and 4 million tonnes were imported. For Brexiteers—we have heard the arguments already in interventions—this apparently shows how much the EU relies on the UK for its exports and so it will do everything it can to make sure its exports get here. What it actually shows, however, is how much UK businesses rely on EU imports to put food on the shelves and for it to be a reasonable price. The UK is far more reliant on EU imports. In terms of export value, it is 27 countries versus only the UK.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman raises a very interesting point. I suspect that when we talk about the import of food into this country, the Government will be reliant on the American market. If they do that, they will be held to ransom. That is what I suspect they are up to.

Alan Brown: That is a valid point. There have been mixed messages from the UK Government. The Trade Secretary says he will get a free trade deal with the United States. The Environment Secretary says we will get a deal but he assures us that there will be no chlorinated chicken or hormone beef. If we trade under World Trade Organisation rules, we cannot impose those welfare standards.

Sammy Wilson: I admire the hon. Gentleman's ability to find a negative in every argument. He talks about the importance of food imports for the United Kingdom. Does he accept that those food imports come from farmers in Spain, Ireland, France and Italy? Does he think that they want transport to be disrupted to the point where their goods sit and rot in lorries? Is that not an incentive for their Governments to do the kind of deal that the Secretary of State is talking about?

Alan Brown: First, may I thank the right hon. Gentleman for saying I can find a negative in any argument? I can assure him that I have a wife who agrees wholeheartedly with that sentiment. He makes my point for me. There will be a whole raft of countries coming together, so the potential hit on them is much less than the potential hit on the UK. It is easier for them to play hardball. Government Members say that they will not play hardball, but why would they not? The UK is trying to play hardball with the EU, so it is quite clear that the EU is going to have to play hardball back.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): My point would be that the hon. Gentleman finds the cloud in every single lining. Perhaps his wife would also agree with that. He talks about food policy and agriculture. When will the Scottish National party release its agricultural policy? The rest of the UK has been waiting for months for the Command Paper. When will the SNP finally come up with policies and make a constructive contribution to the debate, rather than haplessly hitting at the Government?

Alan Brown: For a start, the UK Government have delayed the agriculture Bill. The SNP wants control of immigration to support the farming industry. There are big concerns about agriculture, as the hon. Gentleman

well knows. There are concerns about the power grab and the attempt to override devolved policy matters. We heard at the weekend about the much promised review into common agricultural policy funding. The UK Government kept money that was due to Scottish farmers. They held on to it and we heard at the weekend that the review has been delayed again. I will not take any lectures from the hon. Gentleman on agricultural policy.

For the benefit of the House, I will try to return to the Bill. Part 1 covers the haulage permit system, as stated earlier. This is just an enabling Bill, so the real proof of the pudding will come from a combination of Government negotiations and the secondary legislation that is required as part of the Bill. At the moment, we really do not know what we are getting from the Bill.

The Government have stated that they intend to consult on fees later this year when the negotiations are much clearer, but that does not give me much confidence either. The reality is that we should be there or thereabouts with the negotiations already if we are going to get systems in place and advise hauliers and the Freight Transport Association what the future looks like for them, and what they need to do to comply. Clause 2 also introduces further uncertainty by referring to possible random selection or selection on a first come, first served basis, if permits are limited. If that is the outcome, it will cause further uncertainty for businesses.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My constituency is home to W.H. Malcolm Ltd, one of Scotland's largest hauliers. When I met its staff, they said that the industry has gone through a tough time for a variety of reasons over the last few years. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State's gung-ho, "It'll be all right on the night" approach gives little comfort to hauliers such as W.H. Malcolm and to exporters across the UK?

Alan Brown: I completely agree. I am sure that the haulage company that my hon. Friend referred to—it is clearly a massive haulage company—will have concerns about how the licence will come about, how vacancies will be filled in future and, as we heard earlier, the rising age profile of drivers. Something else that the UK Government have refused to do is help to pay for drivers to be trained so that they can get into the industry. Individuals cannot afford the £3,000 that it costs to train for an HGV licence.

Just to surprise the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), on a slightly positive note, I welcome the fact that clause 9 comes from the Government accepting a Lords amendment about future reporting on the impact on the UK haulage industry of the restrictions that apply to a permit scheme. What I find curious about that is that when I try to get amendments through in Committee that require the Government to report on future implementation, they always vote them down, so I hope that this will be a precedent for other future legislation. I welcome these provisions on future reporting.

Clause 12 covers Northern Ireland. Despite assurances from the Minister in the Lords that this legislation will not result in a hard border in Ireland—we have heard that from the Secretary of State—we need to know how the powers will be enforced and how it will not lead to a hardening of the border. I notice that the Secretary of State could not state clearly how the Irish Government see this operating. The Bill also specifically requires the

[Alan Brown]

consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly, which, as I am sure he is aware, has not been operating for 16 months, so will the Minister or the Secretary of State explain how consent will be sought in the absence of a devolved Government?

Overall, the Government may continue to assert that there will be no hard border, but they need to answer difficult questions about the broader picture regarding not only the Bill, but the customs arrangements and how they will do checks with this mythical “no infrastructure.” The Secretary of State talks time and again about how there are no checks on the US-Canada border, but I remind him that there are. Lorries have to stop there, so that model cannot be followed or else it will mean a hard border in Northern Ireland.

Part 2 of the Bill covers trailer registration as a consequence of ratifying the 1968 Vienna convention. Again, this is a series of enabling clauses with the detail to follow, so we do not know how this will be implemented or what the costs will be. The UK Government has stated again that private-use trailers such as caravans and horse trailers will not fall within the scope, yet those exclusions have not been put in the Bill, so how can we guarantee that that is the case? The Secretary of State might be aware that the National Caravan Council has raised concerns about the lack of clarity on exemptions for non-commercial trailers. It currently operates its own voluntary registration scheme, which is cost-effective and very successful, so any new scheme should not duplicate what it is doing. If needs be, a new scheme should build on what it is doing. We have also heard that this is only a registration scheme, yet clause 14(4) suggests that the regulations may make

“provision for a periodic mandatory safety standards testing scheme”.

What are the Government’s intentions regarding road safety measures for trailers? Is there a planned timescale for implementing them?

In conclusion—everybody will be pleased to know that I have come to the conclusion—we do not know if part 1 of the Bill is required, and if it is, we do not know what the secondary legislation will look like. We do not know what the fees will be. We do not know what the application process will be. We do not know whether there will be limits on the number of permits available. We do not know what additional checks will be required and how the situation will be managed regarding the Irish border. To borrow from Donald Rumsfeld, it seems to me that there are still a lot of known unknowns as regards the Bill. I also suspect that there are further unknown unknowns to follow. Having said that, the Government must be delighted with the progress they have made on taking back control, so I absolutely welcome the Bill.

6.15 pm

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The central role of good Government is to anticipate, prepare and act. In practice, of course, Governments spend a good deal of time responding to things to which they are obliged to react. Nevertheless, it is important that, as Ministers anticipate, they prepare legislation accordingly, and that is really what we are talking about today.

As I read the Bill, I could not help thinking that it is yet another piece of legislation that had its genesis during my time at the Department for Transport. We spend a great deal of time debating Bills that I had a hand in. When I was a Minister, I suppose that excessive humility meant that I did not fully accept the plaudits from the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State, but now I realise just how inventive I was in the Department. It was that combination of perspicacity and imagination that led to so much legislation, including this Bill.

As has been said, the essence of the Bill is to create a framework. The first of the Bill’s two parts deals with establishing a permit system that will allow the continued movement of goods across Europe by hauliers, and the second deals with trailer registration. I do not want to go exhaustively into that—it was described very well by the Secretary of State, and others have made reference to it—but some points of amplification are worth making. I emphasise again the significance of haulage and why the measures that we are debating really matter. Both the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State drew attention to the scale of the industry. It is worth something like £13.1 billion to the economy and directly employs almost 200,000 people but, of course, there are many more jobs in the logistics industry, as we like to describe it in the modern idiom. Around 2.35 million people have occupations that relate to the transit—the movement—of goods.

Through haulage, for the vast majority of goods are transported by truck, the things that we want and the things that we need—they are not necessarily the same, by the way—are brought to us, and the things that we make and sell are taken from us to other places. It is critical that the process is as seamless as possible. I note that there was mention of fresh produce. When we move things around, it is important that we do so quickly, and no more so than in the case of fresh produce. The just-in-time culture that we have created means that the lead times involved in acquiring, transporting and retailing goods are very short indeed, and were they to suffer as a result of any change, it would mean not only a considerable disruption to what we have come to expect, but significant additional costs to the haulage industry, which works on very narrow margins—typically something like 1% to 3%. I have spoken to the RHA about that, both since and while I was a Minister, and it is conscious of the need to maintain that free flow of goods not only for its own sake, but for the sake of all those it serves through the industry including, ultimately, consumers—those who buy and use the goods, and whose lives are made better by their acquisition.

It is therefore important, as the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State have both emphasised, that we make the process as seamless as possible. The optimum outcome, of course, is that it be as much like it is now as possible. As the Secretary of State said, that is what he anticipates will be the product of the negotiations in which we are engaged, and his argument is compelling, because it is in our mutual interest that that is the case. It is absolutely in the mutual interest of countries across Europe that they are able to sell and buy goods as they need them.

Andy McDonald: Does not the right hon. Gentleman accept that while a principle of solidarity exists in an EU comprising 28 countries, once we are a third

country, that principle of solidarity will obtain across 27 countries and their duty will be to each other, not the UK?

Mr Hayes: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument, but I suspect that the commercial interests of those countries and the pressure that commercial interests put on them will, in the end, be irresistible. For example, as was argued a few moments ago, farmers, growers and food manufacturers across Europe—whether in northern Europe or, as we heard, in Spain and Italy in the south—will want their goods brought here, much as they are now. I think the pressure to do a deal in our mutual interest will in the end rule the day.

Now, I do not know that, and the Secretary of State asked, very honestly, "How could I predict that?"—he would not want to, and he did not—but I think a deal in our mutual interest is the likely outcome. He called it his best guess; I would go further and call it my considered estimation.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman touches on a fundamental point. Does he not agree that, if we do not get this right, it will affect costs and quality, certainly for transporters and producers?

Mr Hayes: That is why it is vital that the negotiations go well and why it is important to put in place this framework legislation. It is right that the Government prepare for all eventualities. In opposition, I spent half my time saying the Government were being too precise, too dogmatic, too determined to specify, and the other half saying they were being too open-minded and too flexible. The trouble with all Oppositions is that they meander between those two positions: on the one hand, they want the Government to be specific; on the other hand, they want the Government to be flexible. I slightly sense that that dilemma prevails in respect of the existing Opposition. This is a framework Bill—there is no need to apologise for that. The detail will come forward when we know the shape of the negotiations and how much of the Bill will be necessary. That is a straightforward and honourable position for any Government who want to anticipate, prepare and act.

The shadow Secretary of State made an additional important point about haulage that I also want to amplify. On skills and employment, he is entirely right that, irrespective of our relationship with the EU, there is a pressing need to recruit more people into the industry. As he was speaking, I was looking at notes on this very subject. He will know that the strategic transport apprenticeship taskforce, which has been looking at just these matters, published a report last year, off the back of its earlier consideration, and although there have been improvements across each sector of transport—road, rail, and so on, including haulage—there is still more to do, particularly to recruit people from under-represented groups in the sector.

When I was a Minister, work was being done, which I know is continuing under my successors, to encourage more people into the industry by, if you like, recasting or rebranding it—something I discussed with the RHA many times. That is vital not only on the purely numeric grounds the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but because we want people to have worthwhile careers in logistics. It is an important sector, and there are many good jobs to be had and many important skills to learn

and use, so there is an efficacy in this as well as a necessity. To that end, I hope the work will continue through the apprenticeship taskforce. I gather from its report that there are 15,000 apprentices in road freight this year. I hope that that number will continue to grow. I established an education advisory group in the Department to advise on how we could cast out more widely in attracting people into the industry, and it seems to me that that work should also continue—but far be it from me to bind the hands of my successors.

Andy McDonald: Does the right hon. Gentleman also agree that this is not only about attracting people into the industry but about retaining them? The figures show that many young people coming into the industry do not hang around but go on to pastures new, and that requires urgent and focused attention.

Mr Hayes: It does require focused attention. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: it is about retention as well as recruitment. We must recruit from different sources, which might mean people coming back into the industry, and address the rate of attrition. We must draw on people from other sources—a good example is the armed services, where people, having learned to drive, could re-enter the private sector—and we must attract more people from minority communities, which are very sparsely represented in haulage and road freight, and more women drivers. To do that, however, we have to change some of the working conditions. That is critical to both recruitment and retention.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope you did not mind my digressing a little from the specifics of the Bill in order to amplify an important point that I know is keenly felt by shadow Ministers and Ministers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I just want to raise two points. First, might one way of attracting more young people into the business be for the Government to provide a financial incentive to companies, tied into some contract of employment, to enable us to keep people in the business? Secondly, business is changing and many married people do not want to be away for long periods, so might it be worth trying to engage with single people, and those with more free time and who do not have the same obligations at home? Those are probably two things we need to look at.

Mr Hayes: As the hon. Gentleman will remember, in an earlier phase of my celebrated ministerial career, when I was apprenticeships Minister—I expected at least a titter when I said that, but clearly people take it very seriously, which I am actually rather relieved about—we looked particularly at smaller businesses and their commitment to training and introduced a grant scheme for small businesses that took on apprentices. I think there is a case for looking at that again, particularly in sectors with the most pressing demand—and haulage might be one of them—but I will say no more than that, because I do not want to commit my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to anything they do not want me to commit them to; I simply endorse his thoughts.

The Bill does two things: it provides powers that will support Britain's hauliers to continue operating internationally after the UK leaves the EU; and it gives

[Mr John Hayes]

the Government the necessary framework to introduce new administrative systems if needed after exit. It provides the kind of flexibility I have described and, as has been said, under provisions in part 2, puts in place a trailer registration system in line with the Vienna convention, which, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, came to pass in 1968. It is a UN treaty designed to facilitate international road traffic and increase road safety by establishing uniform traffic rules, and has been signed and ratified by 75 countries. The Bill will allow us to apply it more comprehensively.

I do not want to delay the House any further, because I know that others want to speak—

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): Don't stop! Do go on!

Mr Hayes: No. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame!"] I really feel that it is only fair to others to give them the opportunity to emulate my style and content.

Cardinal Newman—who, in my experience, is given insufficient attention during debates on road haulage—[*Laughter*—said:

"Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt".

Of course there will be difficulties in the process during the period following our departure from the European Union. It will be a cathartic process, and all kinds of challenges will have to be met. However, that does not of itself make an argument for not taking the right action now; it does not of itself add up to the profound doubts that some seem to have. I have confidence in the capacity, skills and determination of those in the industry, working with the Government, to continue to deliver what they currently do so well.

Let me end by mentioning an important haulier in my constituency with whom I discussed these matters this morning. That gentleman, Mr Robin Hancox, runs a business called FreshLinc. His fleet of vehicles brings fresh produce—food and flowers—from the continent to this country. He is determined that his business will continue to work post Brexit. He recognises that that will present some new challenges, but he is confident that the Government are doing the right thing in taking the necessary action to make the process as seamless as possible. I am confident too, which is why I can enthusiastically say that I not only endorse the Bill, but am willing, ready and able to support it.

6.32 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). I will try my best to emulate some of what he tried to say.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the merits of trailer registration and to highlight the rationale and importance of clause 13(3), (4) and (5) and clause 14 (3) and (4), as amended in the House of Lords, and I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his earlier comments. The subsections require the Secretary of State to collate comprehensive data on the number and nature of trailer-related road accidents in the UK, and to include those findings in a report. I welcome that, because the Department

for Transport's current reporting methods do not give us a true picture of the risks posed by light trailers in this country.

The subsections also give the Secretary of State the power to introduce compulsory trailer registration and mandatory testing of trailers weighing more than 750 kg. I accept that as a long overdue step towards improving trailer safety—although it is a compromise—but my work on the issue over the past three years has drawn me to the overwhelming conclusion there ought to be a compulsory register of all trailers weighing less than 3.5 tonnes, and that they should be subject to regular testing. I shall say more about that later.

My interest in trailer safety began soon after I was elected to this place in 2015, when my constituents Donna and Scott Hussey came to see me about their son, Freddie, who had been tragically killed in January 2014. Three-year-old Freddie and his mum were walking along the pavement when a two-tonne trailer came loose from a Land Rover, sped straight towards Freddie, and killed him. The trailer's tow hitch had not been secure, as the position of its handbrake had prevented it from being locked down.

If the trailer had been subject to mandatory roadworthiness checks, the problem with the hitch might have been fixed and the tragedy might never have happened. Currently, trailers weighing less than 3.5 tonnes, known as categories 01 and 02 or "light" trailers, are not required to have any such roadworthiness test, although trailers and their vehicles must be roadworthy when used on the road under section 40A of the Road Traffic Act 1988. That is a loophole: without the licensing and hence the testing, there is no enforcement system.

I do not need to tell the House that the family continue to suffer a life sentence because of the horrific events of that day. However, I have been inspired by their courage and resilience, and we have been working together on a campaign to improve trailer safety ever since.

In the last three years, I have initiated a Westminster Hall debate and had meetings with two transport Ministers: the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) and the current Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman). I have held two trailer safety summits, which were attended by representatives of key national organisations and Government agencies; I have spoken at the National Trailer and Towing Association's annual conference; and I have met various experts with insights into trailer safety, including members of my local police force. The result has been the #towsafe4freddie campaign, launched by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency to raise driver awareness, and an awful lot of hard work by the National Towing Working Group, spearheaded by Highways England and others. The National Trailer and Towing Association has set up a free trailer safety-checking initiative, and Avon and Somerset police have begun trailer awareness training for officers to enable them to spot unsafe trailers on the road.

That work commands cross-party interest and support. I am grateful to the Ministers for their attention to the issues, and for meeting the Hussey family: that meant a great deal to them. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire and his team for attending my trailer summit in Bedminster last month,

and for his willingness to engage with the experts. Despite that good work, however, we continue to underestimate hugely the safety risk posed by unchecked light trailers on our roads—which brings me to the Bill, and its importance.

Part 2 of the Bill deals with the establishment of a trailer registration scheme that would allow UK trailer users to meet the registration standards outlined in the 1968 Vienna convention on road traffic. Registration is critical to trailer safety, because it constitutes an essential requirement for regular safety checks, and prevents unsafe trailers from being sold and resold. However, non-commercial, leisure-use trailers weighing less than 3.5 tonnes do not fall within the scope of the Bill, because they are not included in the convention. I believe that that is a missed opportunity.

In Committee in the House of Lords, Lord Bassam tabled a probing amendment that called for the registration scheme to apply to all trailers weighing less than 3.5 tonnes. He referred to the Government's impact assessment, which stated that the Bill represented

“an opportunity to improve safety through better regulation”,

and asked why the Government would not take advantage of it to widen the scope of the scheme. That raised an important point. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's digital service is now in place to facilitate the registering of trailers. It presents a good opportunity for the registration of all trailers, not only those weighing more than 3.5 tonnes. The Government fear that expanding the scheme would create an unnecessary administrative burden, but that needs to be balanced against the dangers posed by these vehicles. I remind the House that Freddie Hussey—aged just three—was crushed by a two-tonne trailer, heavier than the average car.

The issue of “proportionality” arose several times in the House of Lords, which is why, should the report referred to in the Bill conclude that trailers ought to be registered and subject to mandatory safety checks, the rule would apply only to trailers weighing more than 750 kg. That is a compromise. It is still very much my view—based on evidence that I have seen—that faulty trailers weighing less than 750kg represent a huge safety risk, which is why I believe that all trailers should be registered and checked.

I was delighted that the Lords supported the amendment that compels the Secretary of State to collate comprehensive data on the number and nature of trailer-related road accidents in the UK, and to include those findings in a report, but the key word is “comprehensive”. It would not be good enough for the Government to commit themselves to a report, but to give us what already exists. I would welcome the Minister's clarification of how the Government will define “comprehensive” and how his Department will go about collecting the data. I am certainly not alone in believing that data on the safety of light trailers is currently lacking. During the Lords debate, Baroness Sugg, speaking for the Government, admitted that, having looked at the Department for Transport's road accidents report, she agreed that the Government could and should consider the way in which they report trailer safety, and that it could “definitely be improved”. I welcome that assertion.

In the report, the Department highlights the huge gaps in the data that they currently collate for road accidents generally. They include only accidents that are

reported to the police, that involve a personal injury, and that occur on public roads. The true number is of course much higher. The report states:

“These figures...do not represent the full range of all accidents or casualties”

in Great Britain, and goes on to describe the large proportion of non-fatal casualties not known to the police.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is talking eloquently about safety in relation to trailers and vehicles. We must have a high level of safety, so does she agree that those with licences from other countries, such as eastern Europe, should have the same high driving standards as our drivers in this country? Some, although not all, of the events the hon. Lady has been talking about involve drivers from other parts of Europe who do not have the driving skills that they should have.

Karin Smyth: I agree that we want all drivers to be of the highest standards. I cannot comment on the number of accidents caused by trailers that involve drivers not of that high standard, but in the work I have done over the last three years I have been shocked to discover how many trailers, in agriculture and across the piece, on our roads do not meet the requirements we would ordinarily expect, and I hope this Bill helps to improve that situation.

The current method of reporting a road accident means that there is no real way of knowing whether, and how, a trailer contributed to an accident. The details of incidents involving trailers are largely dependent upon the subjective viewpoint of the police officer on the scene, which the Department's own report admits poses difficulties. The STATS19 form filled in by the officer is complex and gives 78 contributing factors for them to choose from. We currently have several police forces testing new reporting systems because of the huge inaccuracies and the inadequacy of this method.

In contrast to the statistics on trailer-related incidents presented by the Department for Transport, a growing body of evidence from industry organisations and case studies indicate the true scale of the problem. In July 2017, the National Trailer and Towing Association introduced the free safety checks initiative, the first of its kind in the UK, in which light trailers are offered a free inspection at members' premises. Since rolling this out it has found an astonishing 93% failure rate. I hope the work being done will help highlight to Members that they can encourage people in their constituencies to take advantage of these free safety checks and promote their use. Avon and Somerset police have also been carrying out checks and they broadly substantiate these findings; the failure rate is very high.

These initiatives further highlight that what is needed are checks on these vehicles in order to prevent accidents, and not purely the collection of data on vehicles once they have been involved in an accident. With an estimated 2 million light trailers on the road, a large proportion of which are many years old, it is not unreasonable to assume that a significant amount would fail a roadworthiness test. All cars, which in many cases are lighter than trailers, are subjected to rigorous MOT testing each year, so by what logic can the Government argue that trailer safety checks are not integral to improving safety standards?

[Karin Smyth]

It is my sincere hope that the Government will accept the measures discussed as an opportunity to move this issue on and demonstrate their commitment to preventing further tragedies such as Freddie's from happening in the future. We can only do that if we have clearer data on light trailer safety so that the Secretary of State can make an informed decision on whether we ought to have mandatory registration and checks.

In summary, I am grateful for the comments and the work of the Secretary of State and the Minister on this issue and for clauses 13(3), (4) and (5) and 14(3) and (4), but how will the Government define what is "comprehensive"? Also, will the Department initiate new ways of collating data on light trailers beyond the STATS19 form? How does it plan to gather such data? Finally, how does the Minister plan for the data to be gathered to meet the timeframe set out in the Bill—one year from the day the relevant section comes into force?

6.44 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth).

This is a very welcome Bill and demonstrates that the Government are making prudent preparations for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and many other speakers this afternoon have rightly pointed out the importance of the UK's road haulage sector and the contribution it makes to the country's economy. It is, by any standards, an important British industry: it employs about 300,000 people, and in 2015 some 76% of all goods moved in this country were moved by road. It is therefore entirely understandable that the road freight industry is keen to see an agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union on the future of road haulage.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that road haulage is one of his Department's top two priorities. He also rightly pointed out in response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) that about 80% of the lorries operating between the UK and the continent are owned by EU-based businesses. It is therefore clear that achieving an agreement is, or at least should be, a matter of similar priority to the European Union as it is to us. Indeed, I am heartened by the fact that the EU's negotiating guidelines, adopted on 23 March, set out the aim of continued transport connectivity between the UK and the European Union. I am pleased to hear from my right hon. Friend this afternoon that the negotiations are going well, and I have no doubt that it will be to the mutual benefit of the United Kingdom and the European Union, and their respective transport industries, to achieve an agreement that provides for frictionless road transport after Brexit.

However, that being said, the Government are entirely right to prepare contingency measures for the event of there being no deal, and that course of action has attracted the approval of the road haulage industry itself. As part of the process of preparation, Parliament recently ratified the 1968 Vienna convention on road traffic. The UK was already a signatory to the 1949 Geneva convention; however, five EU member states, including Germany,

are party to the Vienna convention but not to the Geneva convention. Ratifying the 1968 convention, therefore, will, in the Government's words,

"address the lack of a mutual legal basis for road traffic"

with those countries. In other words, it will provide for some degree of continued traffic with the EU in the event of there being no deal. As the Government have also observed, ratifying the Vienna convention will enable the United Kingdom to help shape the evolution and future direction of the convention, which is particularly important in respect of automated vehicle technology.

The Road Haulage Association has indicated that ideally it would wish the UK and the EU to use the current Community licence system and all EU rules for road haulage once Brexit has taken place. That may be the most desirable outcome, depending of course on whether the issue of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice can be resolved. The Department for Transport is no doubt considering a number of other proposals that would result in a similar degree of flexibility without ECJ jurisdiction.

One of the proposals suggested by the RHA is that the United Kingdom and the European Union should set up a new authorising system for international road haulage. That may also be a desirable outcome, but in addition there is always the possibility of the UK and individual EU member states setting up a new permit-based system for international road haulage—in other words, a system of bilateral permits.

The Bill of necessity employs a broad brush: it has to take into account all possible contingencies from the negotiations, from complete agreement to no deal. It is therefore necessarily widely framed, and is no worse for that. Part 1 enables the Secretary of State to put in place arrangements to enable a road haulage permit scheme, should it be required. Clause 1 provides for regulations to oblige road hauliers to carry a permit where international agreement requires it. The expression "relevant international agreement" is defined in the clause as an agreement "to which the United Kingdom is a party and...which relates to the transport of goods by road to, in or through the country".

However, in the case of Ireland, an international agreement is expressed as one to which the UK is a party and

"which relates to the transport of goods by road to, in or through Ireland"

and

"which the Secretary of State has certified as an agreement to which the Government of Ireland has consented".

That is for a very good reason. There has been a long history of co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland with regard to transport on the island of Ireland, and I suggest that continued bilateral arrangements are most desirable. In fact, they are equally important for the Irish Republic. The A55 north Wales expressway passes through my constituency, and hundreds of Irish lorries pass along it every day. It is important that the Republic of Ireland's free access to the roads of the United Kingdom should be maintained. I would be pleased to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister what discussions have taken place with the Government of the Republic and whether he anticipates agreement on new bilateral arrangements after Brexit.

Clause 2 allows the Secretary of State to issue permits to applicants and provides for regulations that would detail how hauliers should apply for permits and the

basis on which the Secretary of State would decide whether to grant a permit. I understand that those regulations will be the subject of a consultation by the Department, which is sensible and welcome. The clause also provides for criteria to be used in allocating permits, should they be required as part of an agreement with the EU. Subsection (1)(c) indicates that regulations may make provision

“as to how the Secretary of State is to decide whether to grant an application for a permit, including provision specifying criteria or other methods of selection (which may include first come, first served or an element of random selection).”

Concern was expressed in the other place as to the somewhat haphazard nature of the selection provided for in the clause, and the reasonable point was made that it would be difficult for any haulier to make serious business plans on such a basis. Will the Minister give a further indication as to how such a method of selection would operate? No doubt it will be set out in the regulations in due course, but it would be good to know the Government’s current thinking.

Part 2 of the Bill provides for a system of trailer registration. That has been included in the Bill to enable the Government to comply with their obligations under the Vienna convention, which has now been ratified. The Minister, Baroness Sugg, indicated in the other place that it was the Government’s intention to require only operators that take trailers abroad to register their trailers. It would be good if the Minister could reiterate that commitment and further confirm that the scheme would apply only to commercial trailers over 750 kg and all trailers over 3.5 tonnes. It would also be good if he could confirm that the scheme will not apply domestically.

There remains a lot to be fleshed out, but it is understandable that the Bill should be couched in broad terms at the moment. The House will look forward to further details in due course, but this is a sensible, prudent Bill aimed at facilitating whatever agreement may be arrived at with the European Union while at the same time safeguarding the British position against there being no deal. I am therefore pleased to support it.

6.54 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I have really enjoyed this debate, and I hope that the Minister takes seriously all the points that have been raised in good faith. I am also particularly pleased to speak after my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth)—thank you for that, Madam Deputy Speaker—as I wish to support the points she made on towing equipment and trailers. Last week I visited the Rotherham branch of Towing Centres UK, which fits towing equipment to vehicles. As skilled professionals, the centre’s staff were keen to tell me about the serious gaps in the current legislation regarding safe towing—gaps that the Minister has the opportunity to address today.

The Rotherham Towing Centre is the second facility in the UK to be accredited by Horizon Global, one of the world’s largest suppliers of towing equipment. Customers using such an accredited centre can be sure that a tow bar fitted to their vehicle is safe and secure. The consequences of tow bar failure can be catastrophic, and many of us will be aware of horrific incidents of unsafe towing that have resulted in serious injury or death, yet there is no legal requirement for tow bars to be fitted by a professional. There is nothing to prevent

an unsafe, badly fitted tow bar from being used. Even at the vehicle’s next MOT test, a newly fitted tow bar will not be tested. Added to that danger, trailers between 750 kg and 3.5 tonnes are subjected to no routine safety checks whatever. Vehicles over 3.5 tonnes are required to have a yearly inspection, so it would seem ridiculous to most people that this does not apply to all trailers. A 3 tonne trailer that becomes detached could easily destroy a building. The dangers to other motorists, and pedestrians, are obvious.

The National Trailer and Towing Association has been so disturbed by those dangers that its members have been offering free visual checks for trailers and then recommending what action needs to be taken to make them safe. Since the scheme began, 91% of the trailers seen have failed the test. The Rotherham Towing Centre gave me an example of a catering trailer that its new owner had brought in last week. It had been bought on eBay and, as it was being towed home on the motorway, a wheel came off. During its subsequent inspection at the centre, staff condemned the brakes, the tyres, the hitch and the lights. The centre owner, Irene, said that the only thing that worked was the deep fat fryer.

The amendments moved in the other place by Lord Bassam would go some way towards addressing the glaring safety omissions, and I am grateful to the Secretary of State for acknowledging that in his speech. The amendments do not call for the compulsory registration of trailers or for safety checks, but they would require the Government to collate information on trailer-related accidents and to consider what further regulation is appropriate. As that does not currently happen, we have no idea of the scale of the problem. I am sure we would all agree that evidence-based legislation is always the best approach, and the Bill could ensure that that evidence is robust. Personally, I would push the Minister to go further and to go straight to registration for all trailers.

Finally, I take this opportunity to commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South, who has campaigned extensively on this issue and worked closely with the family of three-year-old Freddie Hussey. I would also like to offer my deep sympathy to Freddie’s family. As my hon. Friend said, Freddie was tragically killed when a trailer became detached from a vehicle. The trailer was later found to be unsafe as the tow hitch was not working correctly. Terrible incidents such as that can be avoided, and I urge the Minister to act to close the loopholes in the existing legislation without delay.

6.58 pm

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): I might not be able to emulate the knowledge and experience of my right hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), the eloquence, erudition and elegance of delivery of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), or the positivity of my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), but I will equally seek to avoid the pessimism of the hon. Members for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). I will seek to address the positives of this important piece of legislation, which is, as Members have said, a sensible preparation for different Brexit eventualities and for the delivery of a smooth Brexit for the people and businesses of this country.

[Edward Argar]

The Secretary of State has been absolutely clear that he expects the UK to secure a good deal, and I share his positivity on that. He is right, however, to bring forward a precautionary contingency Bill. It is the action of a responsible Government to prepare for every eventuality. Indeed, it is also the action of a responsible Secretary of State, and I pay tribute to him for that. Of course, I hope that many of the Bill's powers prove unnecessary, but it is right that we have them, and the regulation-making powers will allow the Secretary of State to create the regulatory architecture to cater for various scenarios.

My right hon. Friend and others have been clear about the importance of the haulage sector both to our economy and to each of us in our day-to-day lives. Lorries may not always be popular, but they are hugely important in making this country function. For the sake of brevity, I will not recount the statistics referred to by many Members, but they set out just how important the sector is to our economy. Not only is contingency planning important and responsible, but the economic imperative for each of us in our daily lives and for our economy is clear. The UK played a key role, starting in 1988 and continuing through the 1990s, in driving forward the liberalisation of haulage in Europe, and it is right that we are now acting to ensure that that continues. Baroness Sugg set out clearly in the other place our country's reliance on the industry, particularly for foodstuffs.

At present, hauliers can move freely within the EU with the Community licence, and a standard international operator's licence is also required for that. Alongside that system runs the European Conference of Ministers of Transport multilateral quota permit scheme. While not without its uses—it is extremely useful—the ECMT quota is small by comparison with the volumes of journeys and hauliers operating within Europe. The Road Haulage Association has expressed reservations about it being too restrictive. While useful, it is unlikely to address the long-term needs of the industry and the country. On our exit from the EU, the Community licence scheme will no longer be available, hence why this Bill is necessary and important. It must not only cover non-EU agreements and any permit-based deal but provide for other eventualities.

Mr John Hayes: The RHA has been quoted at length and repeatedly during this debate, but it has also said that it wholeheartedly supports the Government introducing contingency measures. While it wants seamless transport of the kind that we have all spoken of, the RHA recognises my hon. Friend's point about the Government's wisdom in bringing forward these measures.

Edward Argar: My right hon. Friend is correct. The RHA has adopted a constructive, engaged and positive approach, as he will know from his dealings with it when he was a successful Transport Minister. The Bill will also provide the Secretary of State with new powers to allocate permits and to charge fees, and with enforcement powers for different offences.

The trailer registration scheme is an obligation that derives from the UK's ratification—albeit slightly belated—of the 1968 Vienna convention on road traffic, which we had signed but never ratified and which built on the 1909, 1926 and 1949 conventions. The ratification

of the convention now is part of our responsible preparation for all eventualities. I suspect the main reason why it was so important to do it now is found in paragraph 3 of article 3, which states:

“Subject to the exceptions provided for in Annex 1 to this Convention, Contracting Parties shall be bound to admit to their territories in international traffic motor vehicles and trailers which fulfil the conditions laid down in Chapter III”.

That will help to provide for the continued free flow of cars and commercial vehicles so that traffic can continue as before, allowing the UK to issue international driving permits.

In order that we can comply with the convention and secure the benefits of it, it is important that the registration of trailers is brought forward. The Department has been clear that it proposes mandatory registration for commercial trailers over 750 kg and all trailers over 3.5 tonnes used for international purposes, but not for domestic use. Such a reasonable and measured approach will ensure that caravans, horseboxes and so on are not necessarily caught by the scheme. However, I note that that is not specifically detailed on the face of the Bill, although the Minister in the other place made the point clear. The Bill also enables the Secretary of State to make regulations for such a scheme to be brought in.

On the subject safety, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), who has done so much in this place with her “Tow Safe for Freddie” campaign, following the tragic death of Freddie Hussey. She has been passionate and determined in her pursuit of that cause, as I know some of their lordships were. I hope that the Minister, in his usual thoughtful and sensitive way, will pay due heed to what their lordships and the hon. Lady have said and will address her comments in measured, sensible tones.

I welcome this sensible piece of contingency planning by the Secretary of State—I pay tribute to him for his foresight—and the enabling framework that it provides. I suspect that there may be little actual change and that the powers may prove largely unnecessary following the negotiation of a successful deal, but it is right that we plan for all eventualities and ensure continued liberalised traffic and haulage for the future. That sensible approach reflects not only pragmatism but the Government's clear and focused determination to secure a good deal for Britain, which is in sad contrast to the chaos and contradiction that characterise the Opposition's policy as we deliver our exit from the EU. I again commend the Secretary of State for his foresight and sagacity, and I am pleased to support the Bill.

7.7 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) on his positive speech. I hope that mine will be equally as positive, because almost every time anything about Brexit or leaving the EU is mentioned in this House the naysayers and those who wish to overturn the referendum result will find any excuse to look for faults in what is being presented.

I welcome the fact that the Government are bringing forward this legislation, because it will provide a contingency if there is no deal. Despite what the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) said about this legislation hardly having Mr Barnier quaking in his boots, an important message is sent out every time that

the Government—whether in this Bill or in conversations, interviews or statements—indicate to those negotiating our exit from the EU that we have the option of walking away if they are not prepared to play ball. Regardless of how small this particular warning may be, it is nevertheless part of a picture that we need to present.

Having said that, I share Ministers' optimism and the optimism of many other Members who have already spoken. There is every reason why the current arrangements—the Community licence and the standard international operator's licence—should be made available as a result of the Brexit negotiations. As we have already seen, road transport is vital not just for this country, but for every country with which we trade in the EU.

Alan Brown: The Democratic Unionist party obviously has first-hand experience of how good the UK Government are at negotiating. Given the concessions the right hon. Gentleman's party extracted from the Government, the whole EU saw how the DUP had the Tories dancing on the head of a pin. Does he really trust that lot to negotiate a good deal from the EU?

Sammy Wilson: The proof of the pudding will be in the eating. When the Government stuck their heels in with the EU in December 2017, the agreement was changed and the protocols were not insisted on in March 2018. The Prime Minister stuck her heels in when the Irish Government said June was a deadline. The UK Government made it clear that it might not be done by June, and we have now moved to October 2018. When the Government make it clear that they intend to be in the driving seat on these negotiations, I have every confidence that we can get a good outcome for the United Kingdom.

Of course, there is every reason for us to be confident. Road transport is important to every European nation that trades with us, and it is particularly important to Northern Ireland—over 90% of our trade is via road transport. Road transport is not only important to us. If we look at who actually transports the goods we export to other parts of the EU, we see that 85% of the goods that go from the UK to other EU countries are carried in vehicles owned by EU-based companies. That being the case, there is every incentive for nations with lorries, lorry drivers and transport companies to come to an arrangement with our Government to ensure that free movement can happen. Equally, many of those goods are perishable, and it is therefore important that there is as little disruption to road transport as possible, hence why I believe it will be possible to get the kind of deal the Government seek. Nevertheless, it is important that we have this fall-back position.

The second issue is Northern Ireland. Although I heard the Minister's explanation, I am still not clear on why we need a separate provision in the Bill for agreements on transporting goods to, and on lorries driving through, the Irish Republic and why the international agreements referred to in clause 1 are not sufficient to cover the Irish Republic. I do not share the optimism of the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) that the Irish Government are willing, because of our long-standing arrangements on transport issues, to ensure that a bilateral arrangement can be put in place.

The Irish Government have almost cut off their nose to spite their face on the issue of the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. They know their own head of Revenue Commissioners has made it

clear that there are technological solutions that could ensure there is no hard border so that trade flows easily across the border. The previous Administration in Ireland even started down the route of considering the kind of technology that could be used but, since coming in, the current Irish Government have cut off all the negotiations on those solutions. Only this weekend, they insisted that they will have no cameras, drones or any kind of technology that could make the border a soft border when we leave.

Mr David Jones: Can the right hon. Gentleman say, from his experience of the island of Ireland, whether the Irish Government fully understand the importance to the Irish economy of maintaining free access to the United Kingdom for trade not only with this country but beyond?

Sammy Wilson: It seems that the current Irish Government do not understand. Six times more of their trade is with Great Britain than with Northern Ireland, and more of their trade is with Great Britain than with the whole of the rest of the EU, yet they seem to be willing to pursue a solution that will mean a border and barriers between the Irish Republic and its main market in order to have an open border with Northern Ireland. When it is suggested to the Irish Government that they can have both an open border with Northern Ireland and access to the GB market, they simply put their hands over their ears and say, "We don't want to hear. Nah, nah, nah, nah."

I am not as convinced as the right hon. Member for Clwyd West that it will be easy to get a transport arrangement with the Government of the Irish Republic, and I would appreciate further explanation from the Minister as to why the international arrangements covering other EU countries cannot simply apply to the Irish Republic. If lorries from Northern Ireland go through the Irish Republic, they are going through another country, so why would the international arrangements and agreements not apply? Why do we need a specific bilateral arrangement with the Irish Government who, unfortunately, at present seem to be in a temper tantrum and are not willing to listen to too much logic, even if not doing so damages their own economy?

Alan Brown: While the right hon. Gentleman is castigating the Irish Government—he says they have said there will be no cameras and no technology—will he explain what technology he proposes? The UK Government have said that there will be no infrastructure and no cameras, or anything like that, at the border, so what is this magic technology that will rely on no infrastructure whatsoever?

Sammy Wilson: When people talk about infrastructure, they think of red and white posts on the roads across the border. The one thing we know—I do not want to digress too much—is that during the troubles 50,000 troops could not seal the Irish border. If we think we will seal the Irish border to trade with a couple of barber's poles across a road, we are barking up the wrong tree. That shows a total misunderstanding.

The infrastructure that would be involved is used elsewhere and has been proven, whether it is GPS, telephones, early notification or electronic notification that trade is moving. There are a whole range of things that do not require a physical presence on the border, and that technology could also be used at Dover to

[Sammy Wilson]

avoid the kinds of problems highlighted by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald). It is not just a solution for the island of Ireland but a solution between the United Kingdom and the EU when we leave.

Karin Smyth: I fail to understand why there is no co-operation, when 5.2 million tonnes of trade is going north-south and 3.4 million tonnes of trade is going south-north—I think that is the right way round. The movement of freight across the island of Ireland is clearly critical to both economies. It might help the right hon. Gentleman if we had the results of the mapping exercise mentioned in paragraph 47 of the joint report on phase 1 of the negotiations. There are 140 areas of agreement across the border, but the Government are refusing to let us see the results of that mapping exercise so that we can really understand the true impact across the whole island.

Sammy Wilson: The hon. Lady also has to understand that, although there may be 5.2 million tonnes of trade across the Northern Ireland-Irish Republic border, there is six times more trade between the Irish Republic and Great Britain. Yet that does not seem to exercise the minds of those in the Government of the Irish Republic even a little bit, and none of us can understand that. The big prize lies in finding a solution that allows that east-west trade, as well as that north-south trade without any impediments. I believe we have the technology and ability to do that, but the political willingness is not there.

I want to welcome a second thing in relation to Northern Ireland. In the absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Government have, in clause 12, taken it upon themselves to amend the legislation; many of these issues are devolved to the Assembly, which is not functioning at present. I suspect it will not function for many a long month or perhaps a year, because of the way in which Sinn Féin has now used its veto to prevent the Assembly being reformed. The Minister mentioned that a legislative consent motion would be sought. In the absence of an LCM, I take it that these powers will simply be taken by the Government.

Many Members have made this next point already, but it is worth noting. In the absence of knowing exactly where negotiations are going, and given the nature of some of the information that is required, I would not expect the detail of the scheme to be set out in the Bill. However, it is important that, at the earliest possible stage, people in the haulage industry know how many licences are going to be available, how they can apply for them, how they are going to be allocated and what is going to be paid for them. If some detail can be spelt out, even though it may not be in the Bill, that would give some certainty to the haulage firms that operate in my constituency.

I shall now turn to the part of the Bill that refers to trailers. We have heard some passionate speeches on that subject—from two Members in particular. As a result of personal tragedies in their constituency, they are concerned about the registration of trailers. The Bill is fairly ambiguous on this matter, simply talking about the registration of trailers, full stop, and not dealing with weight restriction, size or anything else. Despite

personal tragedies that people may have faced, legislation must always be proportionate. I would like an assurance from the Minister that the ordinary guy who has a trailer that he uses to take stuff to the dump or uses to collect a few bits and pieces will not be required to go through the process of having the trailer registered and inspected on a yearly basis, with all the cost involved, especially as many of these trailers are used on only an occasional basis. Trailers over 3.5 tonnes, which are used commercially, are probably used more regularly and there is a case for having registration there, but I do not believe that there is a proportionate case for registration for ordinary domestic trailers, which would be affected if we extended this across all trailers.

I welcome the Bill. I welcome the fact that the Government are sending out a signal that, if Barnier and co. decide to dig in their heels, we are prepared to go our own way and that we have made preparations for it. At the same time, we believe that there is a strong case for continuing the current system of Community licensing so that firms that operate a vital part of our economy can continue to provide the service that they do now.

7.24 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): It is a delight to follow the optimistic and upbeat speech from the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson). I welcome this Bill as a modest, appropriate and measured move by the Government to make provision in case there is not a comprehensive free trade deal with the European Union. I am surprised that the Opposition have not actually stated their case. They sound as though they are just not in favour of the Bill at all but, judging by the absence of Opposition Members, I presume they are not going to vote against it. However, I cannot believe that the Bill is not something we would all welcome. A failure to plan is a plan to fail, so why would we not want this Bill?

The UK is an outward-looking, global trading nation, and I believe this will only be more the case after we leave the EU. As many Members have said, trade with the European Union is important—crucially, it is important to both sides. It goes without saying that it is in the EU's best interests to maintain the current liberalised trade by road between the UK and the rest of the EU, and it is also in our interests to maintain that situation. We have heard all the statistics about the huge trade deficit with the EU—£72 billion in 2017—and how much that trade means in respect of the movement of goods across the UK. This shows just how crucial smooth access to the UK market for EU countries is. Many businesses across the continent sell their goods into the UK and, more often than not, they transport those goods here by road. We have all rehearsed the statistics as to why we need this modest measure to deliver that access and they are well in our brains now.

As the Prime Minister said,

“No deal is better than a bad deal”.

We cannot allow our UK hauliers to be left high and dry if we are offered a bad deal—if the EU does not come to a common-sense agreement, although we all believe it will do. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that he is confident about that, and I share his confidence. The UK must make provision to allow for the outcome and this Bill does just that—it is a sensible piece of legislation.

This issue, like many others the House deals with, has significance in my constituency. Our proximity to London means that several haulage companies are based there, operating across the UK and into EU countries. In essence, the Bill is one that we hope we will never have need to call on. It is our backstop—our insurance position—and it therefore should have a fair wind and sail through its Second Reading tonight. I cannot understand the negativity we have heard from Opposition Members, who somehow interpret the Bill as being a massive piece of legislation that gives huge powers to the Secretary of State. I see it as exactly the opposite: something that is tidied away in case we should ever need it, although I share the Secretary of State's confidence that we will not need this Bill.

7.27 pm

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I am sure that the House will be delighted to hear that I do not intend to speak for long on this important Bill. As Members on both sides of the House have acknowledged, this is an essential piece of legislation that allows for a smooth and orderly transition out of the EU and gives the Government a degree of wiggle room to take account of how the negotiations pan out. The Bill will certainly have my support.

I wish to talk, in short order, about the 1968 Vienna convention on road traffic—that is a sentence I never thought I would hear myself say. The ratification that has taken place, after a prolonged period of consideration of some 50 years, has implications that I wish to raise, because they affect the car industry in my constituency. As hon. Members will know, the convention required that a driver was always in control of their vehicle. The provision was amended in 2016 to allow the vehicle to have a degree of autonomy, provided that there was a driver in place to take over in the event of emergency conditions.

My constituency is home to Ford's UK headquarters, where some of the most ingenious and innovative design for the next generation of autonomous vehicles is taking place. The problem with the Vienna convention, even as amended, is that it might prevent the development of level 4 autonomy. Such autonomy would, in effect, allow a whole trip to be automated—indeed, it allows for the removal of the steering wheel. In January, General Motors produced its first such model, the Cruise AV fourth generation, which literally has no steering wheel. That means, of course, that a driver cannot intervene, even if emergency conditions are met.

I am concerned that our ratification of the convention will mean that we are not able to deliver the next generation of automated vehicles in the UK. I am sure that the Department for Transport and the Minister have at their disposal an excellent legal team who will be able to find a way through the issues, but I seek reassurance that the UK will be in a position to continue the excellent work that we have been doing to make us one of the foremost countries in the world for the development of driverless cars.

7.30 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): As a recently elected member of the Transport Committee, and given the significant number of haulage and distribution companies in my constituency, it is an absolute pleasure to speak in the debate.

The liberalisation of commercial haulage has delivered huge consumer benefits in the choice of goods available at affordable prices throughout the UK. Even the smallest corner shops now commonly stock goods that only a generation ago would have seemed impossibly exotic. Trade is a two-way street, and it is the modern haulage industry that has made possible the geographically deep penetration of overseas markets. I note that, according to the Department for Transport, UK road haulage directly contributes more than £13 billion in gross value added and plays a major role in the transport of some £35 billion of goods that are traded between the UK and the European Union. It is therefore only right that as part of our international road haulage policy, we take the need to support the sector seriously.

There is, of course, still some uncertainty about the final Brexit deal. While the negotiations are under way, we must continue to move things forward. I regret to say this, but that uncertainty is compounded by the unfortunate regression in some quarters to the tried and failed politics of "Project Fear". I have been extremely optimistic about the opportunities that can come from Brexit, and it is important that the Government come forward with actions to mitigate the lingering uncertainty. I am pleased that they are making positive provisions, where they can, for maximum continuity and the utmost clarity, including through this Bill. I welcome that positive action, because optimism, continuity and clarity are the most powerful antidotes to uncertainty, and they will mitigate any possible doubts in the industry about future investment decisions in the UK.

The Government are absolutely right to bring forward comprehensive measures that will reassure the haulage industry with clarity and continuity, and thereby enable it to plan for the future without knowing the final outcome of our negotiated exit from the EU. Nowhere is a smooth and orderly transition for the haulage and trailer industries more important than in Stoke-on-Trent. As a city, we are at the very heart of England and the natural centre for the logistics industry. Indeed, the city is a long-standing confluence of inland freight routes by water, rail and road.

Most famously, the ceramics industry is centred in the Potteries, and the experienced hauliers of Stoke-on-Trent are very good at ensuring that we avoid breakages. The haulage and logistics industry in the city is expanding, providing employment, including apprenticeships, to my constituents. I am delighted to say that S J Bargh, the haulage firm behind the highest-scoring apprentice ever at the Scania training school, has an expanding presence in my constituency, and I hope to visit the firm in the coming weeks. There are distribution centres for Screwfix, Sainsbury's, Pets at Home and others in my constituency. Last week, I was pleased to visit the Portmeirion distribution facility, where some of the most advanced technology is used for the distribution of its fragile wares.

On the trailer side, the manufacturer Don-Bur is based in my constituency. I was pleased to visit the company over the Easter recess. It makes every conceivable trailer, from the box van and the curtain-side to the wedge double deck, and even the aerodynamic teardrop shape, for which it is famous. Don-Bur is at the cutting edge of innovation, making trailers more aerodynamic, fuel efficient and environmental. It is fair to say that it

[*Jack Brereton*]

makes precisely the types and sizes of commercial trailer that are intended to be covered under the Bill's registration provisions.

It is important that we ensure that UK operators that use those trailers and other trailer brands can comply with the registration standards outlined in the 1968 Vienna convention when they drive on the continent. How does the Department plan to communicate the effect of the Bill, and those aspects that are yet to be consulted on, to trailer manufacturers and to commercial and non-commercial users? I note that the overview to the Bill issued by the DFT mentions the intention that trailer registration with the DVLA will be done "through a digital service". Is it the Minister's intention that communication with those who fall under the scope of the Bill will be achieved through purely digital means, or will there be some activity in the trade press, and the leisure press, too? As I stressed earlier, we need maximum clarity for those affected, so it is extremely important that the rumours and fears promoted by some are put to one side.

The Bill is an important addition to the Government's measures to ensure that we have a smooth and orderly Brexit. It provides for both continuity and flexibility in the face of temporary uncertainty. We need to communicate that message effectively among those whom the Bill will cover. It is important to my constituents, and to hauliers and consumers everywhere, that we make these provisions and that we get them right.

7.36 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I shall give a Kent perspective on the Bill. Kent is well known as England's gateway to Europe. On a busy day, around 10,000 lorries pass through the port at Dover and an extra 6,000 lorries pass through the channel tunnel at Folkestone. That is perhaps 16,000 lorries a day passing to and fro through Kent, so people in Kent feel strongly about making sure that we have the right processes at our borders come Brexit day.

I well remember my first summer as a Member of Parliament, in 2015, because that was the summer of Stack, when for 32 days the M20 was largely closed and 5,000 lorries were parked up on the motorway. While those lorries were parked on the motorway, the roads around the area were also at a standstill because so much traffic was diverted through the neighbouring roads. That caused chaos and misery throughout my constituency and in many other parts of Kent, where journeys that would usually take five or 10 minutes were taking hours. Children struggled to get to school to take exams, hospital operations were delayed and patients missed their appointments, people could not get to work, and businesses struggled to do their business, gain income and pay their staff. I heard of one constituent, a 10-year-old girl, who fell off a climbing frame and had to wait for an ambulance, injured, for an hour and a half.

After that summer, my neighbouring Kent MPs and I did all that we could to make sure that that would never happen to Kent again—that we would never again see such misery and, in fact, such an economic cost, because that enormous hit to business was estimated to have cost the Kent economy £250 million. As we never

wanted to see it happen again, we campaigned for a lorry park. We appreciate that money was put aside for one, but the project has got into some trouble, meaning it has been delayed. I have spoken to the Minister about the matter, and we very much appreciate the efforts to make sure that, should there be any trouble at the border, there will be alternatives to the closure of the M20. It is important to Kent that we keep the traffic flowing.

In that spirit, I support the Bill, because although we hope not to have to use it, it is about making sure that there will not be trouble at our borders come Brexit day. It is a precaution to ensure that trade will continue to flow and that lorries will be able to travel back and forth as they need to, not only to avoid disruption for my constituents in Kent, but to supply the goods that people need in the EU and that we need here. As others have said, although lorries might at times be unpopular—they are certainly unpopular in my patch for often parking up in lay-bys and country lanes—we know very well that the vast majority of our goods, be they food, drink, clothes or building materials, are transported by lorries. We need a flow of lorries between us and the European Union. We know perfectly well that getting this to work is in the interests of the EU as well as in our own. While we hope that we will not need the Bill, it is right that we have it as a precaution to make sure that we do not have the problems that we saw back in 2015 with Operation Stack.

I welcome the Bill and I welcome the Government's efforts to ensure that we do not have to use Operation Stack again. Opposition Members called that matter into question this evening but, in fact, an enormous amount of work is going on in my constituency to resurface the M20. It is causing some upset, because of the diversions during the night. Lorries are driving through villages such as Bearsted, where they should not be going, and keeping people awake, but at least the work is being done. We know that the hard shoulder will shortly be strengthened so that it can be used in the event that lorries need to park up. I sincerely hope that these Operation Stack measures will not be needed, that the permit scheme will not be needed, and that we will have frictionless trade and free flowing traffic across our borders. None the less, I welcome the fact that the Government are rightly taking the precaution of putting in place these measures just in case they are needed.

7.40 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I will not detain the House for long this evening. I welcome the precautionary measures and the purpose behind this Bill. The logistics, storage and distribution industry is a very important component part of the East Anglian economy, with the container business going through Felixstowe and agricultural foodstuffs going through smaller ports such as Lowestoft in my constituency.

I just wish to home in for a few minutes on a particular business in my constituency. Transam Trucking is very much a specialist in storage and distribution, with an important focus on Europe. It was formed in 1976 and is, in effect, a company of roadies. It provides specialist haulage services to the music industry and it takes bands and acts on tours all around Britain and Europe, particularly during the summer months. It has built up a significant business over its 40 years. Its client list is

pretty impressive. It includes: Roger Waters, Bryan Adams, Iron Maiden, Guns N'Roses, Judas Priest, the Rolling Stones, Ozzy Osborne, Ringo Starr, Gary Barlow, Katy Perry, Billy Joel, and, bringing us up to date, Taylor Swift.

The company has built up this particularly strong business. What concerns it is a particular directive that came out from the EU in January from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, setting out the requirements for its business post Brexit. It is particularly concerned about the requirement for road transport operators to hold a certificate of professional competence, which must be issued by an EU state. The current certificate, which may be issued by Britain, will no longer continue. Likewise, driver attestation must be provided by the remaining EU states. Furthermore, after 29 March, a driving licence issued by the UK will no longer be valid. There is also a requirement that it must have an established base on the continent. We have also heard the issues related to Community licences, and the questions over whether they will still be valid.

Clearly, there is uncertainty hanging over the industry. It is important to bear in mind that this company is now beginning to take bookings for next year—post March 2019—and a number of clients are questioning whether it will be able to continue to provide the services that it has provided for the past 40 years. In particular, I am told that the Germans are casting very envious eyes on what is a great British industry. Can the Minister clarify whether the concerns of businesses such as Transam Trucking have been taken into account in this Bill? If not, can he provide other assurances to ensure that those concerns are allayed?

7.44 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): We have had an essential debate this evening on a Bill that we really should not have any necessity to debate. Although the title of the Bill sounds somewhat niche, the Government's complete failure to secure trading arrangements with the EU means that the haulage industry could come to a complete standstill without this Bill. For that reason, we will not stand in the way of its progress to Committee this evening.

The haulage industry contributes £13.1 billion to gross value added, with 3.7 million tonnes exported and 4 million tonnes imported each year. It employs 319,000 HGV drivers. Although it is 45,000 drivers short, and the settled status is also creating uncertainty for EU nationals, Parliament must, without doubt, understand the importance of this sector to both the economy and jobs, especially with all the other uncertainties in the industry over Brexit, such as driver hours, custom borders and many of the issues that we have heard about this evening.

Negotiations should have established that the UK would be part of the Community licence scheme, along with all other EU countries, European economic area countries and others. This would enable the continuation of the free flow of goods to service our economy, and that is Labour's position. However, even that most basic provision has caused much division on the Government Benches.

Today, the Government have tried to brush over this Bill as a "just in case" measure. The reality is that a no deal scenario, or even a "frictionless as possible" deal,

and all things in between, highlight what a complete and utter nightmare our borders will prove to be without Community licensing or a customs union.

Currently the UK has permit-based agreements with Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Morocco, the Russian Federation, Tunisia and Ukraine and liberal agreements with Serbia, Albania and Turkey. They are typically managed through the DVLA, which in itself is already overstretched. Similar reciprocal arrangements exist, but now everything is up in the air. Therefore, for a lorry to drive on the continent to a destination, or to drive through another country to reach its destination, or within cabotage rules, the haulier will need documentation to prove that they have permission to be there.

We are debating this legislation when we still have no clarity over what the European negotiators will determine is required in these matters, so it is only a "virtual" Bill on something that the Government have no clue about what will be required. As the Secretary of State said, the Government are still, at this 11th hour, consulting on the content. We may pass legislation here, but without knowing for certain that the EU will accept the UK regime, this Bill could be redundant anyway. It is as if we are passing legislation to guide a negotiation process, such is the weakness of the Government with their chaotic Brexit.

Those of us on the Labour Benches are clear: be part of the Community licensing regime, and remove these completely unnecessary trade barriers and uncertainties. This legislation will give the Government powers to create a permit scheme for UK hauliers to be recognised across the EU. It will establish a trailer registration scheme in line with the 1968 Vienna convention on road traffic, which this Parliament ratified on 28 March 2018, so UK trailers are registered for use on EU roads.

If hauliers are looking for clarity over how these new arrangements will operate and how much it will cost them, I have to tell them that they will have to wait until secondary legislation is laid, except, of course, for the £75.8 million from the Government—or should I say the taxpayer—in set-up costs. That is another Brexit expense. Therefore, this is simply an empty Bill, built on a possible negotiated position, with no clarity over how the scheme will operate, or how much it will cost the operator for needing to go to the EU to save our economy—an emperor's new clothes Bill.

For those Brexiteers who now feel that they can say, "Well, at least this means that our borders will be secure", I am afraid to say that this Bill does not automatically stop international road haulage either. But they are right to suspect the worst-case scenario: vehicles stacking up without the right documentation. Research already suggests that two additional minutes spent on checks will result in 10 miles of lorries stacking up. Get this legislation wrong and we will have gridlock at our borders.

I have asked the Minister whether licences could be electronic documents. "No", was the reply. Can Members believe that we are talking about a new system only issuing paper documents? Even in 2018, drivers will be expected to carry paper documents as they cross borders that could be subject to checks. If a permit is not present, fines could be issued. We therefore need an inspectorate. Where will this be based? How will it operate? I am afraid that that is not clarified in the Bill either. We have to wait for the regulations, but that will

[*Rachael Maskell*]

be all too late to create any certainty for the industry, as the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) has highlighted with regard to the music industry.

Commercial traders over 750 kg and non-commercial traders over 3.5 tonnes will need to be registered with the DVLA and will be required to carry paper, not electronic documents. We are told that most caravans and horse trailers will be exempt, unless owners opt for the voluntary register, which we have not heard about in today's debate. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) made a powerful case as to why we also need comprehensive safety measures for light trailers. The tragic loss of little Freddie Hussey showed why this Bill must be amended in Committee to bring about greater public safety. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) further highlighted the impact that tow bar safety would have, not least as 91% of trailers have failed basic safety tests. We need another inspectorate of certificates and trailers in order to ensure compliance as well as administration in the issuing of registration certificates. This means more unknown costs to the industry. Failure to comply could lead to imprisonment and/or a fine.

The noble Lord Tunnicliffe of Bracknell rightly won a vote in the House of Lords on improving safety standards and recording accidents. In Committee we must look at measures such as improvements to exhaust emissions, trailer safety and tyre safety in order to keep the public and drivers safe. He also sought clarity that there would be no restrictions on the number of permits issued—this is so vital for trade to flow—and said that we should not create even more obstacles.

I must seek clarity over the Irish border question with regards to haulage licensing. We are being led to believe that there will be no new restrictions that would limit cross-border road haulage on the island of Ireland. This means that EU to UK haulage and UK to EU haulage will flow without checks. However, when probed on this the Minister said that there could be differentiation across the Irish sea. This is completely unacceptable to the parties in Northern Ireland, and is the central point of the whole customs union argument.

As we understand it, road haulage—for example, originating from Germany—will travel into the Republic of Ireland as it does now, and will be able to continue its journey into Northern Ireland without checks, without borders and with “no new restrictions”. However, it will need a permit if it crosses to England, Wales or Scotland. In effect, are the Government saying with this Bill that they are going to create borders across the Irish sea and therefore cross other red lines? Clarity is needed and has not been provided by the Secretary of State. These important issues need to be resolved, particularly across the whole island of Ireland. This is too important for the Minister just to skim over in his reply, so I trust that he will spell out in detail exactly how these borders will work. Finally on Northern Ireland, the Bill requires a legislative consent motion from the Northern Ireland Assembly, but we all know that the Assembly is currently not sitting. I would be pleased if the Minister told us how he plans to handle that situation.

The true cost and chaos of Brexit can be judged by this Bill. We will hold the Government to account throughout its passage, while advising that we should

remain within current arrangements. There is no reason for the UK to leave the Community licensing scheme, but this is a matter for negotiation—something so simple to establish, but which appears to be too controversial for the Conservative party to unify on.

7.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): It is a great pleasure to close the Second Reading debate on this Bill. We have had an extremely engaging and positive debate in many ways. Cardinal Newman has been invoked, very surprisingly, by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). There has been catharsis. We have had a Scottish National party Member praising the Lords—Allelujah!—and quoting Donald Rumsfeld, which is always an interesting combination.

I have been surprised not to see, during the entire course of the debate, a single Liberal Democrat Member in the Chamber. I was surprised because, as I had understood it, they felt very passionately about the issue of Brexit, and of course this is the first Brexit implementation Bill. At the very least I would have expected speeches and interventions, but in fact not one Liberal Democrat Member has bothered to show their face in the Chamber.

As today's debate has made clear, the Bill is needed to support the continued movement of goods between the UK and Europe. The Secretary of State outlined well in his opening speech that we are committed to maintaining the existing liberalised access for commercial haulage. A mutually beneficial road freight agreement with the EU that secures our objective of frictionless trade is in the interest of both parties. When 85% of trade is carried across the UK border by EU hauliers, we can be certain that EU countries—Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland and the like—have a tremendous interest in the maintenance of frictionless trade. It has also been noted that international conventions support it and the EU's own negotiating objectives demand it.

Today's debate has focused on the two parts of the Bill. The first part deals with haulage permits and provides a framework for the UK to manage them, including if they are needed as part of our agreement with the EU. We will also be using the powers in part 1 to bring our existing international agreements into a comprehensive legal framework—a point that the Opposition somehow ignored or missed.

On trailers, the debate focused on the scope of the trailer registration scheme that will be established in regulations under the Bill. The Government need to establish a trailer registration scheme in order to support the UK's ratification of the 1968 Vienna convention on road traffic. It will ensure that trailer users can register trailers to meet the standards in the convention. We intend to require the registration of commercial trailers over 750 kg and non-commercial trailers over 3.5 tonnes that travel to or through countries that have ratified the convention—it is important to say that. I can give the assurances that my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) asked for earlier.

Many other countries have similar schemes, and both of those schemes will utilise the expertise of our agencies—the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency—to deliver the systems needed.

We plan to have the systems up and running by the end of the year, and see no reason why that should not be the case. It is true that we will be charging fees, but they will be on a cost-recovery basis to minimise the impact on hauliers. We are well aware of the tight margins in the industry, and we will do all we can to reduce the cost of any scheme. The fees will only recover the day-to-day running costs of administering the systems and will not be intended to generate revenue. The Government will cover the set-up costs of the systems as part of a £75.8 million funding grant from the Treasury to the Department for Transport. I am delighted that the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) recognises the distinction between “Government money”, which does not exist, and taxpayers’ money, which is of course the only money that the Government can draw on.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Will the Minister reassure the Central Registration and Identification Scheme, otherwise known as CRiS—a key local employer in Chippenham—that the Bill will not alter the voluntary registration of UK caravans?

Jesse Norman: I recognise the quality of that scheme, and I have spoken personally to the National Caravan Council to discuss it. My hon. Friend will be aware that the vast majority of caravans will not be within the scope of the new scheme as we are currently defining it. Indeed, the DVLA scheme will not concern security, which is the principal purpose of the CRiS regime. We have no intention to replace CRiS, so I do not see that it needs to have any concerns or fears on that account.

I can confirm that the Bill will not have an impact on border arrangements and that there will be no new transport-related checks at our borders. That is perfectly plain. Separately, my Department is working closely with the Department for Exiting the European Union and with Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs as part of the cross-Government borders working group to manage any impacts there may be on borders after we leave the EU.

Stakeholders have welcomed the Bill and recognised the need for it. As has been noted, the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association have given it their support. The Road Haulage Association has said that it “wholeheartedly supports” it and that it is “the right thing” for the Government to be preparing measures for all scenarios. The Freight Transport Association has welcomed the Government’s objective in ensuring that no limits are set on the number of goods vehicles going between the EU and the UK. The Bill provides a framework that should reassure hauliers that the final Brexit deal agreed with the European Union will be smoothly implemented.

With that in mind, let me move swiftly on to some of the many excellent points raised during the debate. As ever, the informed questions, challenges and arguments that we heard are welcome in helping us to strengthen the Bill, and I greatly appreciate the broad support shown for the ambition and energy behind it.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) asked whether the Bill would deter investment. I simply draw his attention to the fact that, as the Secretary of State said, Vauxhall, Toyota and UPS have recently made investments in the haulage and car industries, while Apple, Facebook and many other international businesses continue to invest in this country. He mentioned concerns,

also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), about the impact on the music industry. We will look specifically at that issue in more detail, and I am sure I can provide some reassurance on that front. I have mentioned the support that we have already received from the RHA and FTA.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) for sharing his expertise and for the wisdom he brought to his speech. He made a good point about the importance of the Bill in providing protection against over-zealous enforcement—a point that others did not pick up on—and the extent to which it therefore gives reassurance to people who may already be vulnerable. He asked whether plates could be fitted that could be read by ANPR. That will be part of our wider considerations. We will also consult on the display of plates in order to address the other matter that he raised. That will require tweaking or elaboration within new IT systems, but that is well within the scope and capability of the DVSA and the DVLA.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings made a worryingly restrained speech in which he chastised himself for his excessive humility in recognising his own perspicacity and imagination. I am delighted that he was able to correct that on the record in the House, and I thank him for his unwonted brevity in doing so. He made an important point about the recruitment and retention of new drivers and apprentices within the industry. I am sure that he shares my view that the Road to Logistics initiative offered by the RHA potentially offers an important and interesting route forward for the Government in future.

The most important speech of the evening, if I may say so, was made by the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth). I absolutely salute her work on trailer safety. She has built a reputation across the House for the careful, intelligent and dedicated way in which she has pursued the issue. It was an honour for me to be able to visit her constituency and spend time at the trailer safety summit that she recently organised, and also, of course, to meet Donna and Scott Hussey, the parents of Freddie Hussey, to talk about the experience they have had and measures that we can take to address the issue. We have agreed to report on it within a year of the regulations coming into effect.

As the hon. Lady will know, we have also agreed to consider a recommendation on whether to extend registration. I think it is fair to say that, as she pointed out, the Government currently have quite extensive data through agencies. It is not necessarily, in some cases, the right data to solve the issues that she described, but it is good data. It is also fair to note that, as other colleagues have mentioned, some trailers are used very infrequently, and that extending the scope of the scheme to mandatory registration would potentially include well over 1 million more trailers. We have therefore so far taken the view that given the administrative burdens and other issues that would be involved, a proportionate approach needs to be taken. However, I do not in any sense rule out the proposal that she makes. It is important for us to proceed slowly and carefully and to understand the issues in more detail as we do so.

Karin Smyth: I thank the Minister for his comments. I know that he knows that I will pursue the trailer safety

[Karin Smyth]

regime with great vigour. I hope that many hon. Members will support me in that work in the coming months and years.

Jesse Norman: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that reassurance, but I do not think it was required by anyone in the House who has seen her at work.

The right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) made an important speech in support of the Bill. He asked why we think the agreement will be doable. The answer is simple: because the interests of both parties are well aligned. I cannot comment on the views that will be held in the Irish Republic. This Bill addresses UK hauliers. I can say, however, that the Bill will not result in any impediment to trade between the two sides. We see no reason for concern on that front.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) mentioned the 1968 Vienna convention. We are now a signatory to that. However, like many other contracting parties, we do not take the view that the testing and use of autonomous vehicles is in conflict with either the '68 convention or the '49 convention. Nevertheless, it is an important question and I thank him for raising it.

We have heard contributions relating to Operation Stack, on which we will be publishing a response shortly.

Alan Brown: Going back to the Northern Ireland border issue, surely it is incumbent on the UK Government to seek the views of the Irish Government to see how this is going to work instead of continually saying, "We can't speak for the Irish Government—we don't know what they're thinking." It is incumbent on them to find that out.

Jesse Norman: My officials are of course in regular contact with officials in Ireland and discuss these issues at length, so it would be quite wrong to suggest that there is no interaction between the two parties.

Let me conclude by mentioning the comments of the shadow Ministers. I have to say that the Labour position is very strange. Their strategy seems to be to cloud the issue and scare people as much as possible, and then criticise the Government in calling for clarity. They complain that everything is up in the air but then criticise a Bill whose specific purpose is to act as a sensible, belt-and-braces, common-sense backstop.

We do not think that this Bill is anything other than a thoroughly sensible move. It will ensure that the road haulage industry can continue to prosper as we leave the European Union. As part of our EU legislation programme, the Bill prepares us for a range of scenarios. It will ensure that the UK can fulfil its international obligations and be ready for what happens when we leave the EU.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

HAULAGE PERMITS AND TRAILER REGISTRATION BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill [Lords]:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 5 June.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

HAULAGE PERMITS AND TRAILER REGISTRATION BILL [LORDS] (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State;

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—
(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With the leave of the House, I will take motions 4 to 9 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft East Suffolk (Modification of Boundary Change Enactments) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 19 March, be approved.

That the draft East Suffolk (Local Government Changes) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 19 March, be approved.

CAPITAL GAINS TAX

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Switzerland) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 29 March, be approved.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 28 March, be approved.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief and International Tax Enforcement (Uzbekistan) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 16 April, be approved.

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Special Immigration Appeals Commission (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules 2018, which were laid before this House on 28 March, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Environment Agency: Enforcement Action

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

8.9 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): This is my first end of day Adjournment debate in a very long time; however, I am glad to have secured it as it gives me the chance to raise an ongoing issue in my constituency that has been a source of great consternation to me and many of the residents of Teal Farm and the areas adjacent to the Pattinson Road waste processing sites cluster, which I will refer to collectively as Teal Farm, as that is quite a mouthful.

For more than two years now, or perhaps even longer, residents and local councillors—especially Councillor Tony Taylor, who has been vigilant and tenacious on this matter—have raised concerns about the activity going on in Teal Farm, especially on the industrial estates that neighbour the residential area. It has been going on for so long that I have been applying for this debate for months now, and my former researcher, Daniel Tye, who helped me prepare this speech, moved on months ago. I wish that the issue had as well, but alas it has not. That is what brings me here.

Let me give some context. Washington new town was built in the 1960s as one of a few new towns across the country to help with overcrowding and population growth in local urban areas. In Washington's case, that means the neighbouring cities of Sunderland, Durham and Newcastle. Part of the planning was meant to allow it to be a town with residential estates and industrial estates that were side by side but did not interfere with each other's daily lives. Although the planning was meant to reduce interference between the two, that has become more of a problem as the town has grown and more residents have moved into the area, making the luxury of quiet residential living more difficult than when the town was first founded in the 1960s.

Sadly, the situation in Teal Farm in Washington is a microcosm of that situation; the original idea of residential and industrial being in close proximity but not bothering each other has been thrown out of the window. That has led to tensions between residents and businesses alike, which have extended to organisations such as the local council and the regional branch of the Environment Agency. Unfortunately and annoyingly for the residents of Teal Farm, there seem to be endless cases of problems arising, and local residents have kept me abreast of all the issues through the residents association and the dedicated team of local councillors.

As I just set out, the reason I am speaking today is to document this officially on the record and to prise out of the Minister what more can be done to address the issues of industrial mismanagement that has blighted the lives of many of my constituents in Washington, especially when it comes to environmental issues.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this issue forward; these are always very important debates. Does she agree that it is essential that fines given by the Environment Agency should fit the crime, that legislation should also reflect that, and that the council and the Government need to act accordingly?

Mrs Hodgson: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am pleased with his intervention, and I will come on to fines later, as that is the crux of what I am proposing.

To help the Minister understand fully the scale of the problems that my constituents have faced, I want to read a few excerpts from some emails I have received over the years. I assure him that he will find them both troubling and enlightening about the situation that has been ongoing for some time. First, in 2016 I received an email in which a constituent described the following situation:

“Last week when it was exceptionally warm, I left the windows open in the dining room and sitting room to allow some air circulation for my dog, the scene I returned to was unbelievable. Every single room in my house was inundated with flies. To say that there were upwards of 50 flies in my house would be a conservative estimate, and yes, you read that correctly, I said upwards of 50.”

This constituent went on to say:

“I have lived in Teal Farm Village for three summers now and for three summers this pantomime has repeated itself”.

In a follow-up email, after issues were raised with local agencies, the exasperated constituent wrote:

“Nothing is done to prevent a recurrence, nothing is done to compensate those of us who cannot eat, sit, play or venture into our gardens or onto our balconies or even dare to leave windows open when we are in or out of the house. How about those of us who are woken during the night by smells that have to be experienced to be believed.”

However, not just flies and other vermin but the activity of businesses operating in the industrial park are blighting the lives of my constituents. In an email I had passed to me from March of last year, a constituent documented that he witnessed

“several vehicles over the last week, some from Niramax and two others from their contractors, leaving Monument Park and travelling along Pattinson Road to the A1231—then travelling down the slip road towards the A19. All of the lorries were netted but litter was streaming out of the covered areas onto the road behind them.

Pattinson Road is again awash with litter as is the A1231 slip road from the roundabout—this slip road has not been litter picked since the middle of last year at which time it had not been done for over a year.”

This constituent then went on to say:

“The trees alongside the road have plastic streaming out in the wind dropped from lorries, and the verges are an absolute disgrace. It is no wonder fly tipping is on the increase as litter attracts litter”.

Another very alarming and worrying situation that occurred in October of last year, which was raised with me by Councillor Tony Taylor, involved a badly loaded HGV and an incident when a washing machine fell off the back of a van while it was whizzing down the A1231. The Environment Agency said that it was not going to investigate any further as insufficient evidence had been brought to its attention. Someone could have been seriously injured or killed—there could have been a pile-up—if this washing machine had fallen into the path of another vehicle, yet the case did not warrant any further investigation from the enforcement agency that should have been looking into it with urgency.

As I am sure the Minister can appreciate, these are stressful circumstances for my constituents to live in every day, all because of companies that fail to adhere to their responsibility to be good neighbours and keep

our local area litter-free, as well as the fact that agencies such as the Environment Agency fail to penalise and fine the offending businesses.

There has been plenty of documentation of visits and activity regarding these issues at the industrial park, including a visit by residents, councillors, council officers and a member of my office who saw run-down premises inviting in flies, smells and vermin and in which they could thrive.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I agree with my hon. Friend that the Environment Agency is a toothless tiger, but does she agree that this is not just about the agency but about the fact that it does not work with other Government agencies, such as Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, to crack down on illegal activity—not just dumping, but avoidance of landfill tax and other taxes that should be going to the Exchequer?

Mrs Hodgson: Yes, I agree with my right hon. Friend, and that is not an issue that I had planned to cover in my speech, so I am pleased that he has raised it. I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench heard him.

This issue has gone on for many, many years with many, many complaints and investigations, resulting in significant resources being directed at addressing the problems by the Environment Agency, by my office and by the numerous councillors who have to deal with them week in, week out, trying to take up the cases on behalf of constituents. The Environment Agency has been into my office with a team at least twice, and once into the council offices, and has stressed the amount of resources it is putting in to deal with this one small area in the larger north-east, but the issues returned after breaches occurred and, in no uncertain terms, that has infuriated my constituents—and, I must add, me. It cannot continue.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the Environment Agency has additional powers and that the polluters—the people causing the problem—should pay for the time and resources put into resolving these problems? My constituency had a similar problem with litter a couple of years ago, and it devastated our area. The signs are still there. It is really important to local people.

Mrs Hodgson: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I remember the case she mentions in her constituency of Blaydon. In certain areas, such as driving along the A1231, people can see the plastic still in the trees. We now know that local councils do not have the resources to be picking up constantly after these companies, as they did years ago. It is therefore up to these businesses to be more responsible, and if that means that the Environment Agency has to fine them to make them pay for picking up the litter, so be it.

As I have said, I have convened several meetings with the Environment Agency, which is supposed to deal with these problems, and I have repeatedly been told that it does not have the powers or the authority to do anything other than the bare minimum that it has done. To me, it just seems as though these companies get a slap on the wrist. One constituent, Mr Morgan, has described this sorry saga as

“a badly written Groundhog Day movie sequel”.

and I have to admit that I agree with him. The repeated incidents that have been reported and the breaching of operating permits, with the lack of any apparent enforcement action for so long, have left many constituents and me feeling frustrated and disappointed. I am not blaming the Environment Agency, which is acting within its remit and in accordance with what it is allowed to do under the current law. That is what has brought me to the Floor of the House to plead with the Minister, and I have some solutions about what might be done.

Mr Kevan Jones: I am very interested in what my hon. Friend is saying about wanting more powers, but the Environment Agency already has powers—for example, to enforce the storage of waste at waste transfer stations. In my experience, it is very reluctant to use such powers, or if it does, it gives a slap on the wrist, as she suggests, rather than real enforcement action in conjunction with HMRC and local councils, which would be far more effective in bringing these rogue operators to book.

Mrs Hodgson: I definitely agree with my right hon. Friend. That is why I felt the need to bring this debate to the House. I want to seek the Minister's views on this matter, and find out what more he and his Department can do given the examples that I and other hon. Members have outlined.

I have been trying for many months to secure this debate. It is incredibly interesting that, since I let it be known publicly that I had applied for a parliamentary debate, I have finally seen some activity by the Environment Agency. *[Interruption.]* I know; it is rather curious. It seems that the threat of a parliamentary debate does wonders for getting things sorted—small wonders at least—but this should never be the case, and this matter should never have been escalated to the Floor of this Chamber.

As I have said, the Environment Agency has finally fined one of the major culprits in this on-going saga: Niramax Group Ltd received a fine of £26,000 in January. However, it is frustrating that the Environment Agency clearly made this out to be a victory for it and local residents, yet, as its own press release stated, the specific issue with Niramax had been going on since April 2015. That was nearly three years previously, so it is hardly a victory. It is safe to say that I was flabbergasted by this announcement and stunned that, after so many years of back and forth with the Environment Agency, it had finally pulled its finger out and done something constructive and punitively necessary to sort out the many breaches that have occurred for far too long.

However, in the words of one of my constituents, Mr Kirkland, following this announcement:

“Although the Environment Agency have brought a successful prosecution it has taken an unacceptable amount of time and done nothing but confirm the inadequate regulation of these and other waste operators in the area. There has been nothing done by the Environment Agency regarding the disgraceful and neglectful disregard of the littering laws by the same companies and the main road routes taken by their lorries are some of the worst roadside littering I have ever seen.”

He went on:

“They should be made to pay for our hundreds of phone calls and hours spent complaining to the Environment Agency and the council, and we must now have grave doubts as to the honesty of any such companies who will—we have no doubt—lie through their back teeth to keep their permits.”

As you can appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, my constituents feel that it is now time for regulatory change and for the enforcement powers of the Environment Agency to be bolstered so that such situations never happen again. My constituents have put up with this for far too long. I therefore want to know from the Minister what it plans to do to look into all the cases involving Teal Farm and to learn from the failures that my constituents have had to endure for far too long.

It is only right and fair that my constituents should be able to live a happy and comfortable life in their homes, not see their lives blighted incessantly by the failures and disregard of businesses operating in the area, and that when such episodes take place, they should have the fullest confidence that the agencies, which they pay for through their taxes, will do all they can to ensure that violations are dealt with swiftly and punitively, with on-the-spot fines for any breaches that occur.

I am therefore calling for increased powers for the Environment Agency, so it can actually do the job that it is there to do, and can issue on-the-spot fines to environmental offenders. After all, environmental litter officers can issue on-the-spot fines to the public for littering and dog fouling. Surely the problems that Environmental Agency officers deal with in regard to such companies are just as troublesome—perhaps even more so—and they should face the same penalty action. There should not be any disparity in our approach to litter louts—be they individuals or businesses.

I would like to gauge from the Minister what support there is in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for conducting a strategic review of charges and fines to businesses that breach environmental permits. It is important that penalties are commensurate with the type of business put under the microscope, but also that they take into consideration the scale of the incidents that occur, often on a regular basis, as I have outlined.

Alongside the idea of reviewing fines, I want to hear more from the Minister about the scope for time limits on business permits—perhaps three to five years—and about making them renewable only if businesses are fully compliant with their permit mandates and there have been no breaches at all during that time. One way for the Environment Agency to monitor any such breaches would be to have on-the-spot fines, which I have already mentioned, to penalise businesses immediately.

Another way would be to introduce a “penalties on your permit” system, not dissimilar to fixed penalty notices for motorists who are caught speeding, which could be used as part of the review of businesses' environmental permits when they are up for renewal. Currently, when such a facility is up for sale, the licence the Environment Agency grants is automatically kept with the land and sold on by default. This is a very easy way for unscrupulous companies to obtain a licence. Does the Minister agree that that is wrong?

I do hope that the Minister will look into all of this carefully, and will respond with assurances that I can take back to the residents of Teal Farm. I want to bring my speech to a close, but I have one further point to add. It is pertinent as it relates to the application for a waste gasification plant in my constituency. If successful, this will lead to a huge increase in HGV traffic to and from waste processing plants, and I fear—given what I have set out today—that it will bring the inevitable litter

[Mrs Hodgson]

and congestion. Having written to the Minister about the safety of this plant, I have received letters reminding me that the body ultimately responsible for monitoring the site's safety is none other than—you've guessed it—the Environment Agency.

I hope that the Environment Agency will live up to its promises, and that I have given the Minister some food for thought about the solutions I and my residents in Teal Farm feel could be implemented. I know that Governments do not necessarily like new regulations, but on this issue I think hon. Members would say that I have—and I hope I have—made the case for them tonight.

8.29 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): I congratulate the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on finally securing this debate. I know that she has raised the issue on a number of occasions, both on the Floor of the House and through parliamentary questions, and I am sorry it took her so long to get her debate. The Government do not control the scheduling of these debates, so I can assure her that that was not deliberate.

As the hon. Lady says, a well-functioning and regulated waste industry is essential to ensure that we use our resources efficiently and to minimise impacts on our environment and local communities. The Environment Agency, as she knows, is the lead enforcement agency within Government targeting those who do not comply with the regulatory framework or their permitting conditions.

As the hon. Lady pointed out, badly managed facilities can cause suffering to communities through odour, fires, and vermin or fly infestations, as in the case of her constituency. We therefore take this issue seriously, contrary to some of the points she made.

I will move on to the specifics of the hon. Lady's case in the Sunderland area and particularly to the waste transfer sites that have caused a problem.

Mr Kevan Jones: The Minister says that the Environment Agency is the main enforcement body, so why in the last few years has it not investigated the clear breaches we have asked about in parliamentary questions? For example, there have been a number of fires at waste transfer stations, which are clearly designed to avoid landfill tax and are linked to tax fraud. Why have the Environment Agency and HMRC not looked in detail at any of those?

George Eustice: I will describe some of the action that the Environment Agency has taken in the north-east on a number of issues, but I want first to say that I do understand the particular issue that the hon. Lady raised. In my constituency, I have a similar issue with a waste processing centre and waste transfer site located quite close to a residential area. There is a difficult tension, because it is on an industrial site, so on one level that area is designated for industrial use. When the planning went through, it was assumed that that would be okay. While my constituency experience means that I am familiar with the tensions these things can cause, I have to say that, in my personal experience as an MP, the Environment Agency has taken very serious action to try to deal with the problem.

I want to address some of the hon. Lady's points about enforcement. The Environment Agency has taken clear action in the north-east in recent years. From the start of 2013 until the end of March 2018, it secured 126 prosecutions and 41 formal cautions in relation to waste offences. The agency has also made successful use of confiscation orders under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. Orders to a value of nearly half a million pounds have been made. Moreover, since the summer of 2012, the agency has closed 372 illegal waste sites in the north-east. This equates to over one illegal waste site per week. It has also investigated 2,226 reports of illegal waste sites, which is over one per day.

There are also number of operations regarding serious and organised crime in the waste sector in the north-east. As Members will understand, I am somewhat limited as to what I can divulge about ongoing investigations, but I will say that these operations target organised criminals who use sophisticated methods to cheat the system and ultimately take money from the taxpayer.

Mr Kevan Jones rose—

George Eustice: I am going to carry on if the right hon. Gentleman will allow me.

It is well known that the criminal nature of the groups operating in the waste sector has changed over recent years. Groups are using highly sophisticated techniques to evade the agency. They act violently and threateningly to their legitimate competitors and agency staff, and often use their waste business to mask their involvement in other illegal activities, such firearms or drugs.

The agency therefore works closely with the National Crime Agency to map and detect the extent of serious and organised crime. The agency also undertakes proactive disruption and prevention work. For example, a successful landowner campaign was launched in 2017 in response to the widespread dumping of baled waste in empty buildings. Some 1,300 buildings that were possible targets of waste criminals were identified, and a host of organisations was then contacted.

The EA also works with a range of partners through the Government Agency Intelligence Network. In Teesside, for example, it instigated a local group that includes the police, fire and rescue services, local authorities, HMRC, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, trading standards and UK Border Force. Following on from the positive results of that group, similar area-focused groups are being set up in the north-east.

In the north-east, the agency has a dedicated team of enforcement officers who lead on serious and significant cases of waste crime, and there is a host of resources to draw on for less significant cases. Agency officers use sophisticated surveillance equipment to detect waste crime. For example, officers have recently started wearing body cameras when visiting illegal waste sites.

The Government have ensured that enforcement is adequately resourced. An extra £30 million of funding, which was announced in the Budget in November, has been put into waste crime enforcement. That means that an additional £60 million has been committed to the agency for enforcement since 2014. The additional Budget funding will mean more boots on the ground, with over 80 extra enforcement staff across the country.

The funding will aim to reduce the number of illegal waste sites, prevent illegal exports of waste and decrease waste being mis-described.

The hon. Lady made a specific point about additional powers for the Environment Agency. We are working to strengthen the agency's powers in this area. As part of our continuing to ensure that the agency has the necessary powers and tools to enforce good compliance, we recently introduced regulations to strengthen its powers to tackle problem waste sites. They enable the agency to restrict access to a waste site by locking the gates or barring access, and to require that all waste is removed from a site, not just the illegally deposited waste. That is one example of how we have strengthened the law in this area.

We have conducted a consultation on strengthening the permitting regime. The consultation will tighten up the waste permitting and exemptions regime by raising the bar for people to operate in the sector. It also makes further proposals on fly-tipping. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, which was launched in January and ran for 10 weeks, we will seek to implement the changes later this year. This is an important step to ensure that only fully competent people are able to hold a waste permit. The process will crack down on criminals who choose to operate in the sector while acting under a veil of legitimacy. We strengthened the law on fly-tipping in 2016, introducing on-the-spot fine enforcement notices for people caught fly-tipping. One element of the current consultation is about strengthening that further so that even if we do not catch people in the act of fly-tipping, there will be an opportunity to levy a penalty notice against them when we are able to trace where the waste came from.

Mrs Hodgson *rose*—

George Eustice: I will give way.

Mrs Hodgson: The Minister has plenty of time as we have until 10.30 pm, unless he has a pressing engagement—although what could be more pressing than talking about environmental issues in my constituency?

On that point, the Minister will appreciate that fly-tipping is very different from the issue I raised today. Waste is flying off the back of lorries, which are supposed to be netted, and on to the A1231. One of the problems for the Environment Agency is that that waste will have come from all over the place. Even if the EA or residents see it happening, the waste that they find may come from Joe Bloggs and somebody else. It could be traced back to the lorry and the company to which it belongs, and if an EA officer sees that take place, it should be enough for a spot fine. That was what I was calling for the Minister to bring forward.

George Eustice: I was going to return to that point later, but the type of fly-tipping we are attempting to tackle through the consultation is when a rogue collector of rubbish does not have a permit and then dumps it in a farmer's field or in a gateway. That is slightly different from litter coming loose from a lorry. That would be an issue of permitting for those who transport waste to a particular site and the operators of those vehicles. It is not so much an on-the-spot fine or a penalty notice that is needed in that case as the power to suspend a licence

to operate is incredibly powerful and, I think, the preferred tool. That is why, in the case of operators, we tend to use an improvement notice, an enforcement notice or an actual suspension since that does more damage to them than a penalty notice probably would.

Liz Twist: Does the Minister understand that people in my Blaydon constituency, where two landfill sites have produced their own problems, including with litter, cannot see why the Environment Agency does not have the power to say, "Let's close this site straightaway—it is not working properly. We need to resolve this issue"? It is absolutely crazy that rubbish is being transported across the country in huge lorries to my constituency when we do not dump our own waste there. The rubbish comes from all over the country. Does he not agree that we need to put right that absolutely crazy system?

George Eustice: As I said, I have experienced such issues in my constituency, so I understand residents' concerns. The Environment Agency has the power to issue improvement notices and enforcement notices, or to suspend a permit. It uses those powers and, indeed, has done so in some cases in the north-east, which I will come on to.

To conclude my point about the consultation, we are also tightening the waste exemption regime. That is about looking at some of the sites that currently have a derogation and are exempt from requiring a permit—there is particular concern about those that have tyres and the way in which some are handled. We are raising the bar for those who want to operate a permitted site. That includes the requirement for a demonstration of technical competence, for example, and we have even looked at the idea of sites needing to put a financial bond in place to allow for recovery if there is a problem. I therefore think I have demonstrated that, through the consultation—it was launched in January and we are currently analysing the results—we have taken steps to strengthen the law in the way for which the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West has asked.

I turn now to some of the specific points that the hon. Lady raised about her constituency of Washington and Sunderland West, where there are eight permitted waste sites. Although three have had permit breaches in the last five years due to problems with flies in particular, as she described, all the sites are currently performing well and are rated A or B on the Environment Agency's performance scale—A is the top performance. When there were permit breaches, the agency took the relevant enforcement action. In one case, as she pointed out, there was a prosecution, following which there was a fine of £16,000 and an award of £10,000 in costs.

The most recent of these problems was the 2015 case at the former Niramax site, which the hon. Lady mentioned. That site is now owned by Veolia and is performing better. I stress that the agency and the waste companies concerned work closely to ensure that operators are kept in compliance with permits and to try to overcome problems. For example, in 2014, the agency initiated a permit variation across all eight of the sites permitted to accept waste that had the potential to give rise to fly infestations, which added a bespoke condition on pest management. Sunderland City Council also became involved with breaches relating to public amenity.

[George Eustice]

The Environment Agency works with other public bodies locally, such as the police and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, to monitor standards and performance relating to vehicles that transport waste in the local area. That is particularly important, given the hon. Lady's concerns about waste that is supposed to be netted not being adequately secured to the load. In the most recent checks of over 200 vehicles that were inspected on site or observed on local roads, 12 were found to have minor regulatory issues relating to waste, and the DVSA dealt with two non-waste issues.

In conclusion, I recognise the important issues that the hon. Lady has raised. It is important to highlight that the Government have increased spending on enforcement in this area. I hope that I have reassured her both that we have changed the law recently—in the last two years—to strengthen regulations in this area and that we intend to do more. I have talked about the consultation, but we intend to strengthen the permitting requirements further. I also recognise that she has raised others issues, particularly around transport, and I will ensure that these are taken on board.

Mrs Hodgson *rose*—

George Eustice: I will give way to the hon. Lady because I can see she is keen to make use of the time available.

Mrs Hodgson: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. I know he has given some assurances but, with the summer months approaching, I doubt that my constituents—they will be watching in large numbers,

even though this debate has been held sooner than might have been thought, so they may be watching later—will be as reassured, given that they are the ones who are living with this day in, day out. As I have said, this has been going on for years. I know the Minister says that some of the new measures have come in within the last two years, but they really are not biting or perhaps having the effect he had hoped. I just wonder if he or his Department could keep an eye on this and perhaps revisit it. I will raise it again in questions, and if things are not progressing and companies are not adhering to the enforcement measures, further regulations might need to be looked at.

George Eustice: As part of our consideration around the consultation, I will ensure that an official in the Department takes note of this debate and considers some of the issues the hon. Lady has raised. As I said, we have specific proposals to raise the bar for those who want to operate a permitted site and with regard to the exemptions. If there is more we can do, working with the DVSA, to strengthen some of the standards for the transporting of waste material, we will certainly consider it.

We have had a very positive debate. It has been timely, given that our consultation recently closed, even if it was not as early as the hon. Lady would have liked. She has now had the opportunity to put her constituents' concerns on record, and I hope I have reassured her about the action we are taking, although I also take on board her concern that it might not be enough.

Question put and agreed to.

8.46 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 14 May 2018

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

Grenfell Tower Inquiry

4.30 pm

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): We begin the debate with a 72-second silence to mark the lives lost in the Grenfell Tower fire.

A 72-second silence was observed.

4.31 pm

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered an e-petition relating to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, and I am grateful to you for that 72-second silence, which I know will be treasured by all involved. The prayer of e-petition 206722 says:

“Bereaved families & survivors call on PM to exercise her powers under the Inquiries Act 2005 to appoint additional panel members with decision making power to sit alongside Chair in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry: to ensure those affected have confidence in & are willing to fully participate in the Inquiry”.

The petition goes on to say:

“To secure trust in an establishment we feel has been distant & unresponsive, & to avoid a collapse of confidence in the Inquiry’s ability to discover the truth, it is fundamental that...The Inquiry is not led by a judge alone. Panel members must be appointed with relevant background, expertise, experience, & a real understanding of the issues facing those affected”

and

“Legal representatives of bereaved families see all evidence from the start & are allowed to question witnesses at the hearings”.

As we start this process, it is important to realise that it needs to be a people-led process at every stage, the reason being that real people’s lives are being affected now and real people’s lives have been lost. If you will indulge me for one second, Mr Rosindell, I will read out the names of those whom we are here to commemorate as much as we are here to fight for justice for them: Victoria King and her daughter, Alexandra Atala; Amna Mahmud Idris; Gary Maunders; Deborah Lamprell; Rania Ibrahim and her children, Hania and Fethia; Gloria Trevisan and Marco Gottardi; Fathia Ahmed and her children, Abufars Ibrahim and Isra Ibrahim; Raymond “Moses” Bernard; Mohamed Neda; Hesham Rahman; Nadia Choucair, her husband Bassem Choucair and their three children, Mierna, Fatima and Zeinab, and the children’s grandmother, Sirria Choucair; Hashim Kadir, his wife Nura Jema, and their daughter Firdows Hashim, and sons, Yahya and Yaqub Hashim; Logan Gomes; Abdulaziz El-Wahabi, his wife Faouzia, and their children, Yasin, Nur Huda and Mehdi; Ligaya Moore; Khadija Saye and Mary Mendy; Jessica Urbano Ramirez; Farah Hamdan, her husband Omar Belkadi, and their children, Malak and Leena; Mariem Elgwhary and her mother, Eslah Elgwhary; Mohamednur Tuccu, his wife Amalahmedin and their daughter Amaya;

Berkti Haftom and her son Biruk; sisters Sakina and Fatima Afrasahabi; Isaac Paulos; Khadija Khalloufi; Vincent Chiejina; Kamru Miah, Rabeya Begum, Mohammed Hamid, Mohammed Hanif and Husna Begum; Joseph Daniels; Majorie Vital and her son, Ernie; Sheila Smith; Hamid Kani; Steve Power; Mohammed al-Haj Ali; Denis Murphy; Zainab Deen and her son, Jeremiah; Abdeslam Sebbar; Ali Yawar Jafari; Anthony Disson; and the 72nd person, who died a while afterwards, was Maria Del Pilar Burton.

We must absolutely express our sympathy to the families of victims and the survivors, and pay tribute to the emergency services, volunteers and all those involved in supporting those in desperate need.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): I would like to make an early suggestion to my hon. Friend, based on the experience I had with a charity set up after the World Trade Centre disaster. We will need to consider a memorial for the victims. Is he aware that when 67 Britons were killed in the World Trade Centre disaster a charity was set up in New York, called the British Memorial Garden, with a small London end, which one or two of us were involved in, and that a memorial garden was built in New York, called the Queen Elizabeth Garden? I strongly commend to him that something similar is done in London now for Grenfell.

Paul Scully: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I know that the community have expressed an interest in doing something along those lines. There is a process in train and it very much needs to be community-based. I know the Minister will take that on board and he may say more about it.

I also thank the petitioners—Adel Chaoui, Karim Mussilhy and Sandra Ruiz—and all those who have signed the petition. As of now, the number of signatories is 156,659. I know that Stormzy and the like had a lot to do with that, but it is more than that—it is a community coming out and expressing solidarity, and a country expressing solidarity. I was going through the names of victims and their stories just yesterday. Nobody can fail to be moved by the stories and pen-sketches that have appeared in the lead-up to this debate, particularly in *The Guardian* this morning.

I thank Grenfell United, for the dignified and resolute way that it has represented its community, and Inquest, the independent charity that has supported the community with expertise in the investigation of contentious deaths involving both state and corporate bodies, for its work.

Some things have changed since the petition began. I know that Grenfell United is happy with the appointment of Sir Martin Moore-Bick because of his experience and expertise in regulation and law. It appreciates that that expertise will be valuable in determining what happened, but they believe that the question as to why might not be tested sufficiently without further panel members, in addition to those originally determined by the Prime Minister on 21 December 2017.

However, the written statement by the Prime Minister last Friday was a very welcome move. Appointing two new panel members will add much to the inquiry, but Grenfell United feels that more may be required to ensure that the panel has a diversity of experience beyond that of the two extra members.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): As the hon. Gentleman was reading out the names of victims very movingly, one of the things that I think would have struck all of us was the diversity of people in Grenfell Tower, as is the case with North Kensington and in modern London generally. Grenfell Tower was a symbol of diversity. Does he agree that, if this inquiry is to win the public confidence of such a diverse community like the Lawrence inquiry did some years ago, it needs to reflect that diversity at every level, so that all of the communities who were there, and the relatives of the deceased, will know that this inquiry can speak for them?

Paul Scully: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I will discuss the make-up of panel members later, but it is right that at every level we respect and understand the diversity of the community that has been affected, in particular in North Kensington.

Will the Minister tell us whether the number of additional panel members—two have been added so far—will be kept under review? It is important that the panel is not restricted—the panel needs to reflect the investigation, rather than the other way round. We do not want to restrict the questions the panel can ask, the avenues the panel can go down and the expertise that panel members bring just because we do not have enough panel members with the right expertise.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman aware whether the Prime Minister has responded to the other two demands made by the survivors and the relatives of the victims of this tragedy: first, that legal representatives of the bereaved families are able to see all the evidence from the start of the inquiry; and, secondly, that the families are allowed to question witnesses at those hearings?

Paul Scully: That is something I will touch on later, because I know those things are very important to the Grenfell community—they are the second half of their ask in the petition.

In a statement, the Prime Minister highlighted the extensive nature of the inquiry. Some 330,000 documents have been received so far—many more are expected—and about 183,000 have had a first-stage review by Sir Martin and his team. Will the Minister explain how the Prime Minister can be sure that two additional panel members will be sufficient and offer enough diversity of opinion should the inquiry continue to grow in complexity?

The hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) mentioned the make-up of the panel. There would undoubtedly be concern if all the panel members were white middle-class Oxbridge alumni, but the community understand that the make-up has as much to do with experience as with ethnicity and background. When I spoke to him last Friday, Adel, one of the petitioners, cited the appointments of Dr Richard Stone and the Most Reverend Dr John Sentamu—then Bishop of Stepney—to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry panel as an excellent example of how members should be chosen. Those individuals had a wider understanding of the community and brought a very different insight to the inquiry from that of Sir William Macpherson, a retired High Court judge—now Lord Macpherson—and Tom Cook, a retired deputy chief constable. Lord Macpherson

himself credited his panel of advisers with playing a crucial role in shaping the inquiry's important recommendations.

Sir Martin has appointed 547 core participants to the inquiry, 519 of whom are individuals from the Grenfell community. They will receive relevant evidence in advance of hearings and be able to make opening or closing statements at some of them, suggest lines of questioning and, with permission, ask witnesses questions through their own legal representatives. That number of core participants is unprecedented, but the petitioners have noted that their role remains limited next to that of a panel member, who can make decisions and ask questions without notice. Such questions are more likely to get a straight answer, rather than one that has been developed while the witness has been preparing for the inquiry hearing.

The second part of the petition asks for greater scope for QCs to be able to question witnesses and review all the evidence. In asking for this, Grenfell United cites the Hillsborough inquiry as an example of how some of the key evidence that helped to get to the bottom of why things happened came from the questions posed by the families' QCs. The petitioners feel that the impartiality of Sir Martin and his panel means that they will not be able to, or will not think to, ask certain questions that would be required to uncover crucial information, whereas the core participants' QCs will not have that constraint.

The quick commitment to hold an inquiry is welcome, but the community are clear that they want it to be done properly the first time around, with the process not being rushed, but not being dragged out interminably either. One concern about the appointment of the panel members for phase two of the inquiry only is what would happen if those new members felt they could not make a judgment because they had not been able to analyse all the evidence from phase one and had missed the opportunity to question witnesses during that phase. The petitioners worry that that could risk preventing the inquiry from being able to come to comprehensive conclusions. If phase one needed to be revisited at a later date, there would be considerable impact on the families, with their having to relive everything yet again. Such repeats would also significantly increase the cost and time, which would risk damaging the credibility of the inquiry.

The petitioners believe that the police inquiry may well be the more significant part of getting to the bottom of what happened and why, and of bringing justice to those people who lost so much. With the inquiry starting before the police investigation had finished, there is a further risk that any delays will cause complications for both the inquiry and the police investigation.

I very much value the time that Grenfell United took to meet some 100 MPs in the Speaker's apartments last week. In the briefing they shared with us afterwards there was a third request: that the Government undertake now to guarantee that any recommendations from the report will be implemented in full. Although I am sure we all understand the sentiment of that seemingly simple request, I would not expect the Government to go quite that far at this stage, before the inquiry has even started in earnest. However, it is important that the Government are open, understanding and responsive at every stage of the process, because the community believe that those three qualities have been lacking, certainly during the period leading up to the fire.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a very good start to the debate. May I suggest that it has been wonderful how the Speaker has brought everyone together on this important issue and shown great sensitivity, together with Rose our chaplain, when it comes to how we as parliamentarians come to terms with something so dreadful?

Paul Scully: I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the Speaker. He has shown compassion at every point; many of us saw how powerfully and emotionally he spoke at the reception last week. The Speaker's office was on to my office last week when there was talk of a possible announcement by the Prime Minister. He is really keeping a keen, close eye on developments. That is as it should be; none the less, it is an absolute testament that we should pay tribute to him.

There is no doubt that we need to do everything we can to build and retain trust with a community who feel left behind. Those of us who spent a few moments on Parliament Square just before the debate will have seen the raw feeling that is still there 11 months on—and we can absolutely understand why. There are so many unanswered questions and so many people still unhoused—an issue I will return to.

Last week, a resident described what had happened as a tragedy in three acts: being ignored during the refurbishment of the tower, the fire itself, and the sense of abandonment at certain times afterwards. The Minister and other members of the Government have updated the House on several occasions about what is being done to rehouse those who lost everything last June. I do not underestimate Ministers' efforts and the work they are undertaking to allow survivors to rebuild their lives, but we need to ensure that the Government go as far as they can to assure residents that they will not simply kick the inquiry—or any part of it—into the long grass. I dare say that the Lakanal fire will be mentioned a good few times during the debate, but we cannot countenance any situation in which recommendations are filed in the “too difficult” drawer. There can be nothing too difficult to ensure that there is no repeat of the Grenfell fire.

While I was speaking to Grenfell residents, they naturally raised other issues of concern, which I am sure will be mentioned in this debate. I heard that some people were still unable to move into new homes. A number of reasons were given, but the one that struck me were the considerable delays in getting gas certification for the properties. We need to address that sort of bureaucracy in some way, shape or form, so that efforts can concentrate on the more complicated rehousing needs, while the higher duty of care as a social landlord is still being met. I used to be involved with residential properties, and I know that gas certification is a relatively straightforward process that should take days to organise, not weeks, so will the Minister update us on what is happening in that regard?

People living in tower blocks around the country will be following the Grenfell situation carefully. I have been in touch with my constituents many times over the last 11 months, especially those in Chaucer House and Balaam House—two tall, recently clad buildings in Sutton. I understand their fears, and I will continue to be in touch with them until we have all the assurances

and the remedial work they need. I hope that the Minister will continue to keep us up to date with fire safety testing. Will he tell us whether the new Secretary of State will continue to evaluate both the merits of banning desktop studies entirely and Dame Judith Hackitt's recommendation to restrict their use?

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is taking far too long to ensure 24/7 security provision for tower blocks where the cladding has been found, and that the Government need to step up and ensure prevention work as a matter of urgency? That is not to mention the private blocks—Ministers have confessed that even they do not know how many are affected. There needs to be greater urgency in dealing with the prevention of future risks. Surely it is vital that the Government take that on board.

Paul Scully: When I was in the hon. Lady's constituency, and in Newham—I was going around the boroughs campaigning in the local elections—seeing some of the tower blocks was a real eye-opener. There was one with, I think, 20 floors, that had 14 people working in it—one in reception and then fire wardens looking after two floors each. We find ourselves in that extraordinary situation when basic fire regulations should be put in place in those people's stead. Yes, we can always do more, and I am interested in hearing what the Minister will say.

Paula Sherriff: The two lovely ladies I met at the reception last week had only just been rehoused. I am not familiar with the geography of London, but they said they had been offered homes all over the city. When I asked them if they had lost everything they had owned in the fire that night, they said it was not about material possessions but that they had lost a community.

Paul Scully: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. On the whole, most of the houses are within a couple of miles of the site. It is a relatively small, incredibly expensive area of London, so it is always going to be a huge challenge to give everyone what they need, but on the other hand, as I have been describing, we must rise to and meet that challenge. It is crucial that we do so.

Lots of people want to speak, so I will conclude. Will the Minister please convey my thanks to the Prime Minister for listening to the community in North Kensington and increasing the number of panel members, which was the right thing to do? The Grenfell community clearly will not have time to keep petitioning the Government, raising significant points of interest. The Prime Minister is committed to supporting everyone affected. The Minister is listening, as did the previous Minister with this portfolio, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma). I urge the Minister to continue in that vein. The people in the Public Gallery, in the Jubilee Room next door and outside on Parliament Square are looking to us to provide answers.

Within Grenfell United and other organisations are community leaders who are immense in their dedication and resolve. That is because they share the memories, the hurt and the uncertainty over their future, but they are 100% committed to getting their friends, family and neighbours to the other side—to a point where they can start to move on. While we still need to focus on the immediate programme of ensuring that everyone affected has a good home as soon as possible, getting this

[Paul Scully]

inquiry right first time is so important to getting answers, securing justice, bringing some closure to a very dark chapter and, yes, ensuring that such a tragedy can never happen again.

4.51 pm

Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab): First, I thank the Petitions Committee for making this debate possible. As the Committee will know, after the initial disappointing response from No. 10 to the request for a debate, I wrote to the Chair saying that I felt that response was inadequate. I am pleased that the Committee agreed and asked No. 10 to review its response. After months of extra work from survivors and the local community, many feel that this moment could be a turning point towards getting the justice they need.

I will lay out some of the concerns that the community and related local groups and representatives have about the public inquiry. I ask the Chamber to bear with me as I run through a few of the many occasions when the community has been badly let down since the fire at Grenfell Tower changed their lives for ever.

On 15 June 2017—the day after the fire and while the tower was still smouldering—the then Communities Secretary stated that, under the Bellwin scheme, immediate financial assistance would be offered to the local authority to support Grenfell-affected people. The former Housing Minister guaranteed, on behalf of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the Government, that every family would be rehoused in the local area. That guarantee has not been delivered. On 16 June 2017, the Prime Minister committed to rehousing those who had lost their homes within three weeks at the latest and as close as possible to where they had previously lived. She set the public inquiry in motion, and assured those affected that they would be able to help shape the scope of the inquiry. Those commitments have not been delivered.

On 17 June, the Prime Minister stated that the support on the ground from Kensington and Chelsea Council had not been good enough and ordered immediate action. She then confirmed the deadline of three weeks for everybody affected to be found a home nearby and announced that the inquiry would be open and transparent and that Government and Ministers would co-operate fully—three further commitments that are undelivered. A week later, the Prime Minister again stated that the support on the ground had not been good enough, and that a taskforce had been set up. She reassured people that the fire would not be used as a reason to carry out immigration checks, and that all victims would be able to access the services they need, “irrespective of immigration status”. Those reassurances have not been delivered.

I have in my file a record of all the pledges, commitments and guarantees made by the Government. So many have not been implemented. Since last June—it has been 11 long and very painful months for all those affected—the Government have been criticising the failures of Kensington and Chelsea Council, saying that it is simply not good enough. The taskforce report was unequivocal in its criticisms of the council’s response and gave a number of recommendations that the council has still not implemented. Despite that devastating report, the Government will not listen to the calls of residents’ groups and the Labour councillors who support them

for commissioners to be called in to deal with the council’s frankly shocking ongoing failure to rehouse victims.

Last week I had one of my regular meetings with the team in charge of rehousing. They are on their knees. Finger-wagging from the Government will not help; they need outside assistance now. I take this opportunity to repeat our request to the Government to call in commissioners to take control of rehousing, which frankly is in chaos. It is yet another example of how Grenfell-affected people have been badly let down while the Government refuse to take actions that are within their power.

Let us now look at who has and has not been granted core participant status. More than 500 individuals have been granted the status. Quite correctly, those who have been directly affected—the survivors and bereaved family members—have been granted core participant status. While Kensington and Chelsea Council has been granted CP status, the opposition Labour group, bizarrely, has not. It opposed the Conservative council on so many of its social housing policies, including how the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower was carried out and the location of the school at the foot of the tower. The Labour group of councillors has been considered, in some kind of joint enterprise judgment, to be part of the council. Despite two appeals, Labour councillors—including the ward councillors for Notting Dale, where the tower is located—have been refused separate CP status. While supposedly being considered jointly accountable, the Labour group has no access to lawyers and no access to documents that are part of the inquiry.

I personally requested CP status as MP for Kensington, as someone with experience as a board member of the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation until 2012—I am well acquainted with the dysfunctional nature of the organisation—and as a member until 2014 of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, which is supposed to scrutinise the TMO. I was also refused by the judge, as apparently I have “nothing to add”. The chair of the Grenfell Tower compact—a kind of residents’ association—was directly involved with the negotiations throughout the period of the refurbishment, and they were also refused.

We have heard about some bereaved family members granted CP status whose visas have expired and who have been forced to return to their home countries. They have been told, despite previous assurances to the contrary, that they are not to be afforded extensions to their visas so they can attend the inquiry, as is their right. Shockingly, they have been told that they can watch proceedings on TV. I give those examples to underline the frustration of those concerned at being excluded from the inquiry, which is so important to their grieving, their peace of mind, and their demand for justice.

Unfortunately, there is a precedent for the frustration at the results and recommendations of a public inquiry. From June 2016 to June 2017, I sat on the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority at the Greater London Assembly, which was charged with London-wide organisation and planning of these services. Much of our time was dedicated to lobbying Government for the implementation of the Lakanal House inquiry recommendations of 2013. Six people had died in a preventable fire that involved external cladding and

fire spread. If the Lakanal House recommendations had been implemented, Grenfell Tower would not have burned. If they had been implemented, 72 lives would not have been lost, yet to this day—and despite the then Secretary of State's insistence that they have been—the Lakanal House inquiry recommendations have still not been implemented.

Whether it is our community or the various industries concerned, there is little confidence that the recommendations of the Hackitt report, due within two weeks, will be implemented either. What do we have to do to ensure the safety of those for whom we have responsibility? Do they not have a right to life? How can the Government state that no stone will be unturned and that everything is being done when so clearly it is not? The Government state they have given the council £72 million towards housing and other necessary services. Meanwhile, a fourth food bank is about to open to serve the immediate Grenfell area. I find that shocking and unacceptable. How can the Government stand by and wag their fingers while Kensington and Chelsea Council is so clearly failing in its statutory duties?

Some Grenfell-affected people tell me that they have had enough of hearing that politicians are honoured and privileged to have met them and heard their stories. They have heard enough about resilience and dignity, as if somehow it is a surprise that people living in social housing have any kind of integrity and discernment. They feel they are being told, in the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy)—in another context—to

“be quiet, be grateful, know your place”,

and that somehow, if they behave appropriately, according to some unwritten rulebook, they will get their dues. Some people feel they are being played, or that there is a “divide and rule” ploy to split the community. If that is so, it is a misjudgment because in this matter the community is united. Let us have no more platitudes, no more lionising those you wish to control, and no more attempts to pacify, neutralise, sideline and mollify people whose genuine and justified concerns are being ignored.

Grenfell-affected people, represented by Grenfell United, Humanity for Grenfell, and other more or less formal groups, are asking for no less than what they are due. They do not want charity—they want reparations and they want justice. They tell us, “Nothing can bring back our family and friends, but we need justice.” They need to have confidence in the inquiry, and to do so they are asking simply for an advisory panel, with diverse experience, expertise and decision-making powers, to sit alongside the judge and to be involved in both phases of the inquiry. They want an undertaking that they can have some input on the selection of panel members. They want agreement that the inquiry will be carried out with diligence from the outset and that panel members will be fully involved. They want an understanding that recommendations on building and fire regulations are implemented without delay so that we do not have another Lakanal House situation where recommendations are ignored.

There has already been criticism about the very narrow remit of the inquiry and the fact that social, economic and political considerations are not to be considered. Survivors and bereaved family members have expressed their concerns, but were not listened to. The announcement on Thursday that only two additional panel members

will be appointed to only the second phase of the inquiry is welcome, but we know they can be appointed at any time. Many feel, after so many disappointments and failures, as I have just described, that there will be full confidence in the inquiry only if the additional panel members are appointed without delay. We ask that that is expedited now.

5.2 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) for presenting this important debate.

Grenfell Tower was quite simply an horrific tragedy that will doubtless have an effect on all of us for the rest of our lives. As someone who served as cabinet member for regeneration on my local authority, I am keen to have concrete answers as to how it was allowed to happen, who must be held accountable, and what will be done to prevent it from happening again.

I am sure that none of us here or anywhere else across the country will ever forget waking up on that Wednesday morning to see those terrible images of that blazing inferno in the heart of our capital city. Lives were lost that should never have been lost, and lives were also changed for ever. It could all have been avoided. That is why I welcome the findings of the Hackitt review's interim report that calls for a culture change within the construction industry, which should take on much greater responsibility for what is built and how it is built.

The interim report also highlighted several broad areas for change, including improvements to the process, compliance and enforcement of regulations, as well as providing and creating a quick and effective route for concerned residents' voices to be heard.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): In the interim report, Dame Judith stated that she would not recommend detailed changes to the technical requirements. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with groups, including the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Local Government Association, who have repeatedly called on Dame Judith to recommend bans on combustible materials on tower blocks and on so-called desktop studies? Does he not agree with me that the only solution is to ban combustible cladding?

Giles Watling: I absolutely agree that we must ban combustible cladding. It should never have been used in the first place. We must move on and that is why I was talking about how the construction industry must take on greater responsibility for what is built and how it is built.

I am pleased that the Government will consider any recommendations made by the review and how they will interact with the requirements of the construction product regulations. That is a step forward, but we still have many steps to take, including the work that Ministers have been doing with local government officials and organisations to provide support to the victims—both in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy and in the long term. The autumn Budget 2017 also committed £28 million of additional community support to victims. It is right that we do all we can to support victims and to ensure that such a tragedy never ever happens again.

[Giles Watling]

I call on all my colleagues to support the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability for Housing Standards) Bill, introduced by the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck). It is a truly cross-party endeavour. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government helped to draft the Bill ahead of its publication. It will ensure that everyone is entitled to a decent home and that all properties should be free from potential risks to the health and safety of occupants. That really should go without saying. We can all agree that provisions must be put in place to ensure that that can happen everywhere. Having read the Bill, I agree with Shelter that it would help to achieve that aim by enabling meaningful action to be taken on poor and unsafe living conditions for renters.

The Bill will build on a raft of policies introduced by the Government aimed at driving up standards in the private and social rented sectors. Those include empowering local authorities to fine failing landlords up to £30,000. From April, local councils will also be able to issue banning orders to put the worst offenders out of business altogether. Passing the Bill would be another positive step towards ensuring that such a tragedy never happens again.

Although we have done some good work, I am conscious that questions remain unanswered, so it is right that we are having this very important inquiry and that the inquiry panel was expanded. Those we are seeking to provide answers for must feel certain that the inquiry is working for them. An expanded panel will provide that certainty, and all Members of the House must now allow the inquiry to proceed without its being used as a political football. In the face of such tragedy, we should all work together.

I do not say that the issue is not political—everything is political, from planning decisions to housing—but we need rational and responsible politics if we want to do right by the people who lived in that tower and by the countless people who live in other such towers across the nation. By doing that, we may well be left with the type of reasonable, thought-provoking and evidence-based political debate that uncovers all the aspects of Grenfell and moves us towards a better policy for all people in such housing in the future.

5.7 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I dedicate my contribution today to my friends Khadija Saye and Mary Mende, who lost their lives in Grenfell Tower. This debate does nothing really to convey their lives and their memories. I am sure everybody else whose friends or loved ones were victims will feel that. Nevertheless, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) on her outstanding speech. I associate myself with all of her remarks.

I welcome the decision taken on Friday to appoint two additional panel members to sit alongside Sir Martin Moore-Bick on the inquiry. The decision is testament to the courage and dignity of the survivors and the families of the bereaved, many of whom I have had the privilege of getting to know over the past year. However, I regret that the Prime Minister ignored the calls for a panel for so long. I regret that she ignored the findings of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, in which Sir William Macpherson said that

“the Inquiry would have been infinitely less effective”

without the advisers he had alongside him as chair. I regret that a petition and a debate in Parliament was required for the Prime Minister to finally change her mind. I regret that people who are in grief and suffering so much pain have had to organise and campaign and beg the Government to ensure that their voices are heard. From the start the Prime Minister has failed to recognise who the inquiry is actually for.

Today, almost one year on from the Grenfell Tower fire, and despite all the promises that have been made, 72 Grenfell households are still living in hotel rooms, a further 64 are still in temporary accommodation, and only one third have been housed.

Ms Buck: On the subject of meeting unmet housing need, does my right hon. Friend share my shock that London housing associations are still auctioning properties on the open market in areas such as Kensington, Hammersmith, Camden, Brent and Westminster, when there is at least a possibility that some of those properties might be available to meet those needs?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. How can it be that properties are available, and as a country we are unable to bring to bear both the state and the local authority to get those homes and house those people? Why is it that, a year on, my hon. Friend has to make that point as well as she has made it?

We have to ask whether the inquiry for the people who were failed before the fire, and who have been failed after the fire as every promise made to them has been broken. The inquiry is not for the Government, and it is not for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. It is for the victims. It is for the people who died in the Grenfell fire. It is for all who managed to get out of the tower, but still relive that night every single day. It is for the bereaved families and their broken hearts. It is for everyone who is grieving and carrying the burden of loss around with them, like a scar burned into their soul. It is for the people who saw the burning, saw people jumping to their deaths, and still have to look at that tower every day. It is for the people who are still living in hotel rooms, 11 months on.

This is about more than just a panel of advisers. The people have been badly let down. Of course there is deep mistrust of authority within the community. Of course they have no faith in the state and the establishment. If the Government lose sight of who the inquiry is for, it ceases to be an inquiry. It becomes a talking shop and an exercise in spin. It is up to the inquiry to ask tough questions and interrogate the authorities on behalf of the Grenfell families. That is why it is so important that survivors and families, and their representatives and lawyers, are able to ask uncomfortable truths of those who give evidence to the inquiry.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman makes some very fair points. Does he accept, though, that the Prime Minister has not ruled out including other panel members at a further phase of the inquiry? She has simply said, in the interests of expediency and getting answers as quickly as possible, “Not at this stage.” Phase two of the inquiry may be open to the addition of more panel members.

Mr Lammy: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. I would simply say that we should have had those panel members right from the beginning. That was the evidence of Macpherson, when John Sentamu and Richard Stone were so important to the community. We should have those panel members now. Quite understandably, the community will want to get into the detail of who those panel members are, and how they can have a say and influence that. If we have an inquiry that fails to represent the people in whose interests it is supposed to act, it has failed before it has even begun. I do not want it to fail. I want it to get to those answers, but trust is important within that.

It is important that we understand the role of the state in this, because if you are middle class in Britain, you only really rely on the state to care for you if you get ill, if you send your children to Church schools, maybe because you use a leisure centre, or to take your rubbish away. However, if you live on the 22nd floor of a tower block, the state literally has your life in its hands. It is the state that you rely on for the roof over your head. It is the state that you rely on to come up the stairwell and save you and your family from a burning building. It is the state that has told you to stay put. It is the state that has approved the combustible cladding around your building. It is the state that sets the rules for the regulations that govern your life. It is the state that has failed to install working fire alarms. If you cannot afford to be in the private sector, you are at the mercy of the state. That is the bottom line. It is the state that has failed, so it is the state that has to work hard to regain the trust of the Grenfell families.

Why does trust matter? Because trust in the inquiry is a precondition of justice. If there is no trust, there will be no justice. A lack of trust will affect participation. If those affected do not fully participate, we cannot and will not get to the truth. If we do not get to the truth, we will not get justice. If we do not get justice, we will get injustice—more injustice.

Representation, which is at the heart of this debate, matters. Look at the Grenfell survivors; look at them clearly. Look at the families of the bereaved and the community of north Kensington protesting outside Parliament today, and sat in the public gallery during the preliminary hearings. Then look at the Cabinet—not just this Cabinet, but Cabinets under the Government that I was part of. We do not have representation. We do not have the experience of living in a tower block estate.

Let recent history serve as a reminder of what happens when we do not have that representation. We get residents associations being ignored time and time again when they raise fire safety concerns with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. We get a local authority that cares more about saving money than the lives of people living in social housing. We get a council leader in a local authority in London—a city with 700 tower blocks of 11 floors or more—who had never even set foot in a tower block before she became leader. We get a local authority that cares much more about how the tower block looks in appearance to the rich folk who live around it than the lives of those inside it. We get two thirds of Grenfell households still living in hotel rooms and temporary accommodation.

When the voices of people living in social housing were ignored and marginalised, what did we get? We got a towering inferno, burning into the sky as a reminder

of what happens when the state does not listen to those it purports to serve. We got the senseless and avoidable death of people who burned to death in their homes.

At a memorial service for Hillsborough, Professor Phil Scruton read the poem, “Their Voices Will Be Heard”:

“Shattered by loss but unbroken in spirit
In the face of injustice you never backed down
You forced them to listen, you sacrificed your lives,
You bore witness with dignity on the day of reckoning
And their voices, your voices, have been heard”.

The voices of Grenfell Tower have not been heard yet. Their voices were not heard before the fire, and before the Prime Minister did the U-turn that brings us to this point today. This is a test for the leadership of the Prime Minister. Can the Government regain the trust of the Grenfell family? Theresa May talks about burning injustices, and this injustice burned. If the inquiry fails to gain the trust and confidence of the survivors and the families of those who lost their lives, we will not get justice. I remind the Government of what Neville Lawrence said in 2012, almost 20 years after the loss of his son Stephen:

“The loss itself, together with the lack of justice, have meant that I have not been able to rest all this time.”

That point must hang in the air. How do we regain that trust? How do we demonstrate that we really get what representation means? How do we honour those lives? How do we recognise that it is the state that has failed, and how do we ensure that we are not too establishment to put the state and those who assisted it—the private contractors and others—on trial?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): Order. I advise Members that there will be an informal six-minute limit to speeches for the rest of the debate.

5.18 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) for introducing the debate. It is a pleasure to speak after the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), many of whose comments I agree with entirely.

There is no doubt that what we witnessed at Grenfell was a complete failure of our system, on the most horrific scale and with the most horrific consequences. Everyone who is associated with the system, including myself—we are part of the system—should apologise to those who lost their lives. There were 72 needlessly lost lives, and hundreds more lives ruined, because of what happened at Grenfell. It is entirely unacceptable that this could happen in this day and age. It is our 9/11, but it is entirely self-inflicted.

I have had the pleasure of meeting many members of Grenfell United and local residents, and I pay tribute to their determination, their composure and their steadfast approach to getting answers and finding solutions. No doubt they feel they have been subject to injustice and discrimination, and that they were treated like second-class citizens in the lead-up to this terrible tragedy. Those are their words, not mine. They now, quite rightly, want answers and solutions, but the first question I would ask if I were in their situation is, why would I trust a system that has already let me down?

[Kevin Hollinrake]

The feelings behind this petition, which 156,000 people have signed, are understandable. There is a clear need for additional panel members so that those affected have confidence in the system, to ensure that the people on the panel have the relevant background and experiences, and so that the legal representatives can ask the right questions and see the right evidence. To reiterate what I said earlier, as I read the Prime Minister's letter, she has not ruled that out. Clearly, we need to get answers as quickly as possible. The letter said "not at this stage". There are two distinct phases to the inquiry, and phase one is a fact-finding mission: it is about the what, not the why. The most important time to look at the panel members is when we look at why it happened. I have had discussions about that. We must look at why this happened and get to the bottom of that.

Grenfell United applied for a judicial review, which was heard by the High Court on 4 May. Lord Justice Bean and Mr Justice Edis looked at the question of additional panel members and conceded in their conclusions that there are arguments either way. Clearly, the Stephen Lawrence inquiry and the Hillsborough independent panel are examples of where that has happened, but there are examples of where it has not happened. They said that an initial report is required as soon as possible, and that they therefore understood the current position. Their conclusion said that phase two of the inquiry may be an appropriate time to include different considerations and to cover a larger number of issues. [Interruption.] Those are not my words; they are the words of those judges. That is the right thing to do, and I spoke to a justice chief executive about that point at Mr Speaker's reception last week.

There are other big questions that need answering, certainly about rehousing, but the important point is that this tragedy must never happen again. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee has looked at this issue, and we are very concerned that Dame Judith Hackitt's interim report seems to imply that there will be an outcomes or risks-based approach, rather than a simple prescriptive approach to completely ban combustible materials. We have had correspondence with Dame Judith Hackitt about that point. In a letter of March this year, she said that in current regulations "there is currently a choice between using products of limited combustibility or undergoing a full-system test... The former"—non-combustible materials or products of limited combustibility—"is undoubtedly the low-risk option."

I cannot think that Parliament would ever countenance a higher-risk option after what we have been through. It is absolutely critical that that inquiry, which reports on Thursday, also comes up with the right conclusions.

We absolutely need confidence in the inquiry. The request about phase two seems reasonable to me. We must clearly do everything we can to support and rehouse those affected. Future regulations must be as clear and risk-free as possible to ensure this never happens again.

5.24 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): Part of the Government's response to Grenfell must be to ensure that it can never happen again, but nearly a year later, far too little has been done to give people living in

blocks like Grenfell with similar cladding that very important reassurance. In 2009, the Lakanal House fire caused the loss of six lives. In 2013, the coroner reporting on that tragedy told the Government that the fire safety guidance was confusing, unclear and not fit for purpose, and that it needed to be revised, but the Government did nothing. In 2016, flammable cladding was put on Grenfell Tower, and in 2017 Grenfell Tower went up in flames. Had the Government listened and acted, those people would be alive today. Industry figures show that there is still an average of one fire a month relating to that kind of cladding. How long will it be before one of those fires is not put out? Eventually, that will happen unless we take that cladding down.

In the immediate aftermath of the fire, Ministers stood up and declared that the cladding was not compliant with the guidance or the regulations, but the Government's chief fire safety adviser signed off specification for the same kind of cladding for use on high-rise residential blocks. That emphasises the coroner's point, after the Lakanal House fire, that the regulations and guidance were unclear and confusing. Ministers did not know, because they cannot interpret the guidance any more than anybody else can.

We will have to wait and see what the Hackitt review comes out with, but there are widespread concerns that it is compromised because there are so many individuals on it representing vested financial interests, and the early reports of what is coming out of the review do nothing to allay those fears. The Government must act without further delay.

My concern, which is widely held in the sector and by people living in blocks that have the same kind of cladding as Grenfell, is that a money-go-round is operating in the fire safety sector. The BRE makes considerable revenue from running fire safety tests for cladding manufacturers, which are able to design their own tests and keep rerunning them, slightly differently, if they fail, until they get the result they desire. They are then able to keep the detail of those multiple tests, and even the fact that they have taken place, secret on grounds of commercial confidentiality. That simply cannot be right. That gives the BRE, which also drafts the fire safety guidance, a direct financial interest in allowing the use of semi-combustible cladding, which is banned in many EU countries, because non-combustible cladding would not require the same level of very profitable testing—of course, it also would not result in so many deaths.

Ministers need to start listening to independent sources of advice. The chair of the Government's fire safety expert panel is a trustee of the BRE. The culture that allows that is why nothing has changed since Lakanal House or Grenfell last year. One of the reasons why Ministers do not want to recognise these failings is that they do not want to accept their share of the responsibility for the tragedy that happened at Grenfell Tower, but they must recognise failings if they are to put them right. Ministers must now change course. There can be no more Grenfells, but there will be another if Ministers do not act.

5.29 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): I had not intended to speak in this debate, but I have lived in London all my life. I am 42 years old and of a west African background. My mother, who still practises as a barrister

at the age of 74, had one or two relatives in Trellick Tower, which is near Grenfell Tower, so I spent time there as a boy.

One of the things that is missed about this whole debate is that that location, Notting Hill, with the race riots and the carnival, is very important to the Afro-Caribbean community. It is an area that I have known on and off all my life, although I do not know it intimately, and many here know it much better. I assure the House and those who hear the debate that I have not really engaged as much with this issue as I might have, given my responsibility in the Treasury as a Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chancellor—I was appointed just when this tragedy happened—but what I have to say, as a Londoner, is that I found it extraordinary that 72 people died in the tragedy.

I have lived in and around London all my life, but I have never heard of anything similar before. The Grenfell fire was a huge tragedy and a national scandal. People on both sides of the House, but on the governing side in particular, have to be generous and open enough to recognise it for what it was. Frankly, it is a disgrace that that sort of thing can happen—that a tragedy and loss of life on that scale can happen in London. As a governing party, we cannot walk away from it. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea cannot walk away from it either—although I am not saying that it has done. We have to understand the history of London—of that part of London—to understand the resonance for many people in such an appalling tragedy.

What happened over the decades in Notting Hill? Initially, it was the hub of the Afro-Caribbean community, and many people came to Britain from the Caribbean and Africa to make a home there, but over the past 10, 20 or 30 years what people call gentrification has happened. The area originally had a vast connection with people of diverse communities and faiths, but over 20 or 30 years property prices increased and there was a new influx of much wealthier inhabitants. The area changed and—I am not saying that this happened, but there is a suspicion that it did—the priorities, values and interests of the people running the borough changed. As more people with more money came in, there is a suspicion that the people who were left behind commanded less of the attention of the local councillors or even perhaps of the Government.

We have to talk about that context—about North Kensington and Notting Hill, and remembering the Notting Hill race riots—when we look at how scarring the tragedy was. Nothing like that has happened in London before, certainly in my recollection.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I am a London MP, and some of the shocking statistics that we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) about the housing situation of the Grenfell families sound eerily and uncomfortably familiar to my casework, given our housing load and the struggle that my local authority has to rehouse people. All of our constituents are entitled to a decent place to live, but the situation of the Grenfell families is particularly egregious, and this goes directly to the point about trust made by my right hon. Friend: if, now, the state locally and nationally cannot mobilise effectively to ensure that every Grenfell family has a decent home to call their own, what does that say to the

entire country about the ability of government locally and nationally to deliver the priorities of the people? Housing is such a basic need—I urge the hon. Gentleman as a Treasury PPS to take this message back to the Chancellor—and we need action on housing across London, but for goodness' sake we should have moved heaven and earth to ensure that those people had a decent home.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I cannot talk about the circumstances in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but clearly housing is a need. Specifically, however, I want to talk about this tragedy and its location, and about how resonant it was. I do not have much time, so my final remarks are addressed to colleagues on the Government Benches. This is an incredibly emotive and resonant issue. In many of the speeches—not perhaps today—and the things that I have read, there is massive compassion but not enough empathy about how important the issue is, and how seriously people of different faiths and communities treat it. There is a danger that people reciting statistics or even facts simply lose sight of the human element.

A national scandal happened in June last year. From my point of view, Grenfell is the biggest challenge that the Government face—forget Brexit and all the rest of it. Grenfell asks us questions about who we are as Conservatives, what our values are, and our ability to connect with people from the wider community and with new immigrants. I shall not mention Windrush—we have talked a lot about that—but I say to the Government and to other Conservative Members: we have to be very sensitive. We have to not just give the impression but feel that we are batting on the side of the people who have been affected. We can make lots of speeches—although I do not question our motives or emotional response—but I warn my fellow Conservative MPs that this is a big question about our own motivations and values. The eyes of the world and certainly of people in London are watching us carefully.

5.35 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): It is a genuine honour to follow the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) and to hear some uncharacteristic honesty from the Government Benches about people who feel left behind. I am speaking about people's feelings and, if we get this wrong as the inquiry unfolds, about what we will be deciding to do to people's feelings.

Last week, in Speaker's House, I met the auntie of Tazmin Belkadi. She is a little girl: both her siblings and both her parents were killed in Grenfell. She is now being raised by her family, who wish for her to have a normal life—a life just like my children's or the lives of the children of everyone else in the Chamber—rather than having to deal with just having the identity of a kid who was in Grenfell.

I have met children of the Hillsborough disaster who were seven years old when it happened. I have met children of the Birmingham pub bombings families who were nine and 10 when it happened—43 years later the rictus remains, the pain and suffering on their faces: not ever because of the incident in fact, but because of their continuing fight for justice for their families. At every stage, people have not considered their feelings, or how it is never to be able to grieve properly while still also having to fight.

[Jess Phillips]

For 43 years, my constituent Julie Hambleton has fought to get some semblance of truth about what happened to her sister. She was a child when her sister died, and every time I speak to her she cries about it as if it is 1974 again. I was not even born, but that is as real to her today as it was all those years ago. Tazmin Belkadi deserves better than that life, growing up trying to ensure that her sisters and her mum and dad get justice. It is in our gift to do that for her—to ensure the passage of facts and truth, and a mea culpa by those who ought to stand up to say, “We did this wrong.” That would stop that little girl from being the future Julie Hambleton or Louise Brookes, whose lives have been changed immeasurably by having to fight the state.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Does the hon. Lady acknowledge that the pastoral skills of Bishop James Jones, who led the Hillsborough inquiry, brought significant closure for some of the Hillsborough victims and their families? He is now leading the inquiry on contaminated blood products, a long-standing injustice for the victims. Although they can never bring the departed back, the correct assembly of skills brought together—particularly those pastoral skills—can assist the families in bereavement. We have every hope that the same will be true for the victims of Grenfell.

Jess Phillips: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Lady; she has been an ally to the families of the Birmingham pub bombings and she knows a thing or two about how families go through these situations. It is vital that we take real care of the feelings of the people involved. So far, that has not happened. We have come to an impasse where they have already had to fight with a petition to get us to listen to a basic thing that they were asking for. That should never have happened.

Let us grease the wheels and not think that these families are unreasonable in their demands. It was raised with me at Speaker’s House that the building is being covered up, and that the families did not it to be covered in white, as if it would fade away and be invisible. They do not mind it being covered up; they recognise the trauma it causes for children in the community, especially when they have to look up at it—although there is diverse opinion, as one could imagine. They wanted it to be covered in a vibrant colour. That just was not listened to. When they complained, they were made to feel a little like they were being a bother.

I want those people to be told that nothing is a bother. I want us as a group of people who make decisions, and the Government, to be a parent to these people. When my son says to me, “I don’t want to go to school”, or “I think I’m being a bother”, I say to him, “Nothing you need is a bother to me. I’m going to help you in your life, to make sure that you feel that I care and I have your best interests at heart.” We have failed in the past so many times to stop people feeling like a bother.

I will finish on the fact that there is a class issue. People recognise hierarchy and feel they cannot speak up. We have to make sure that we never act supreme over these people, because nobody knows more about what happened, and the what of the initial phase at

Grenfell, than the people who lived there. The absolute expert in that is Tazmin Belkadi—and she will be for the rest of her life.

5.43 pm

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. It is a particular pleasure, and perhaps a daunting prospect, to follow my friend, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). As Brummies, I feel “friend” is the appropriate word. It is appropriate that I should follow her, because I want to open my remarks by talking about the idea of sentiment and feeling.

My understanding is that some people postulate that there are five stages of grief that people move through, beginning with denial, then anger, and ending eventually in acceptance, although as the hon. Lady said, I understand that that period of acceptance may never come. The feeling may diminish over time, but originally, I was approaching this situation from a much more technical position.

I am a civil engineer by degree and a member of the Chartered Institute of Building, so I was giving some thought to the complexity of the panels, how they may be configured and where else they might be deployed. Of course I would do that because, as well as being a member of the Chartered Institute of Building, I chair the board of the housing association in Walsall. We have 20,000 houses. Following the Grenfell disaster, we had to review our buildings in order to determine whether we had any aluminium composite materials—ACMs—in buildings that we were building or cladding at the time. We determined that, in one case, we had exactly those elements present in one of our buildings. Although it was relatively low rise, we fully appreciated that the people living in that building would be concerned. It was not a question that would be answered by referring them to a technical building regulations document that would allay their fears. They needed reassurance on the basis that a tragedy had happened and they wanted to ensure, beyond reasonable doubt, that they would not be involved in a similar tragedy.

One of the things that helped to move me along massively was the opportunity to meet Grenfell survivors last week. I spoke to Hisam, who had lost six family members. The level of grief is incomprehensible to me. I lost my father 18 months ago. That feels like a dreadful tragedy, but he was an 83-year-old man who had a stroke and we had the opportunity to spend time with him before he passed away. It is not a comparable situation at all. I cannot begin to understand the level of grief experienced by those affected.

While speaking to Hisam, I thought, “Are you reassured with regard to the way the Government are handling this situation?” He explained to me that they wanted to bring family members over from another country to offer support to those who were grieving in this country. The barriers that they faced were incredibly intractable. When finally they were given the opportunity to bring family members over, my understanding is that it was for a two-week period. Sometimes we have processes that people follow by virtue of some sort of diagram or detailed specification, and we lose sight, as an hon. Member said earlier, of the fact that we are talking about people, not processes.

Similarly, Hisam had a child who had been affected and who had missed some time from school. He hoped that some one-to-one education might be provided to help that child catch up with the education he had lost. Originally, that was refused by his school. He needed to move to another school before, eventually, the original school said, “Actually, we could have provided some support after all.”

This is not a technical question about composite materials and ACMs; this is about how we treat people. I see at first hand just how complicated that can be. I used to be the assistant chief executive of the YMCA in Birmingham. We had 300 accommodation units for formerly homeless young people. We had a building that we refurbished that used to be a social care building in Birmingham, so we had an architect design a scheme for us and we refurbished it to create 33 flats. That was two years before Grenfell.

In the light of Grenfell, we went back to the fire safety experts—in fact, we brought in new experts—to review the layout of the building and ensure that we would be able to manage a safe and secure building for the vulnerable and frequently chaotic young people that we serviced. Dreadfully, we found that some items in the layout of the building needed to be addressed in order for us to regain that confidence. That building had been designed and refurbished only two years previously, yet there was an opportunity to reinterpret and be more secure in the judgment that was applied.

I sincerely hope, although I fully appreciate that it is unlikely, that we will be able to help people to move through all those stages of grief and to reach a point where they feel a level of acceptance. As a Government of MPs, not just the governing party, it is beholden on all of us to ensure that we provide that support from a people point of view rather than a process one.

5.49 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I start by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad). Becoming an MP is daunting, as I found out three years ago, but at the same time as doing that she had to deal with this enormous tragedy on her doorstep. If I may say so, she has done a very good job. Her speech was very courageous and contained some hard home truths. I hope Government Members were listening carefully.

I led for the Scottish National party when we debated the scope of the inquiry on the Floor of the House in July. Like others, I said that there should be a panel of advisers to sit with the judge chairing the inquiry. That was one of the demands of BMELawyers4Grenfell, which said there should be a diverse panel. Like others, I followed my speech up with a letter to the inquiry and to the Prime Minister, renewing my request for a diverse panel and adding that the terms of reference should be as broad as those of the Macpherson inquiry into Stephen Lawrence’s murder.

To be frank, that seemed to me like a bit of a no-brainer. It is an absolute disgrace that it has taken 10 months and a public petition to wring a concession from the Prime Minister on the appointment of the panel. Like others who have spoken, I am concerned that we do not yet know for certain how many people

will be on that panel or what background they will be drawn from. Will the Minister reassure us that the lessons from the Macpherson inquiry, which we were all reminded of by the powerful BBC documentary about Stephen Lawrence’s murder, have indeed been learned? When I met survivors and bereaved families last week, they said to me that they felt it was “morally reprehensible” that they had had to campaign so hard to get that concession about the panel while they were grieving and trying to put their lives back together. I fully endorse that sentiment.

The Prime Minister has at last listened to the Grenfell victims on that. We now need assurances that she will listen to the inquiry’s recommendations and that there will not be the same fight to ensure that those recommendations are followed, no matter how uncomfortable they may be for those in government and their friends—including their party colleagues—on the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. and learned Lady is making an excellent speech. I wonder whether she has looked at the aftermath of the Manchester Arena attack, which happened around the same time. Mayor Andy Burnham instigated the Kerslake review very quickly, and put the families and their wishes at its heart. That review has already reported, and every single recommendation has been agreed to.

Joanna Cherry: I of course endorse that. I had hoped that the days of the sorts of cover-ups we saw after the Bloody Sunday murders and Hillsborough were over. I think they are, but I understand why the families of the deceased and the survivors of this terrible tragedy still require assurance.

As a lawyer, I feel strongly that there must—not should, but must—be equality of arms at the inquiry. In a previous life at the Scottish Bar, I represented the families of bereaved people at fatal accident inquiries in Scotland, which are a bit like inquests. In general, I found that unless the family of the bereaved had their own counsel, who was well prepared and able to ask difficult questions, the truth was not got at. The state did not seem capable of getting at the truth without the assistance of counsel fighting for the family. But counsel cannot do that with one hand tied behind their back. As others have said, it is very concerning to hear that only a tiny percentage of documents have been disclosed so far. Can the Government guarantee that issues with disclosure will be addressed?

It is a disgrace that promises to rehouse the survivors of this terrible fire have been broken on no fewer than three occasions. I want to say a little about that before I sit down. This tragedy illustrates the wider, very real issue of the neglect of social housing in this country. When I say “this country”, I mean England. I am happy to say that in Scotland, even under the constraints of Tory austerity, we have taken steps to address that by building tens of thousands of new social homes and getting rid of the ridiculous right to buy. Again, I would like to hear assurances from the Government that lessons will be learned from this tragedy and from the council’s failure to rehouse about the need to build social and affordable housing for everyone who lives in this great city, so that they can live in the area they belong to and in their community in affordable, safe housing.

5.54 pm

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I would like to add to the debate by drawing the parallels between the fight of the Grenfell survivors and their families—I know some of them are here today—for truth and justice and the synonymous struggle in my city, Liverpool, of the families of the 96 victims of the Hillsborough disaster, who we can at long last say were unlawfully killed.

The pattern is consistent: powerless people's voices are ignored by those in power. The parallels are everywhere—prior to both disasters, concerns were raised but ignored; after the disasters, powerless families wrestled with authority and the law for truth and justice. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Hillsborough Justice Campaign and the Hillsborough Family Support Group for their role in offering support and solidarity to the survivors and the families of Grenfell. It took them 27 years of tireless campaigning to get the truth about what happened at Hillsborough, and the fight for justice continues to this day. That cannot happen again in this situation.

When bereaved families campaign for justice, they deserve openness, transparency and access to the very same tools that are available to the powerful. That is why we need a Hillsborough law. We need to make it a legal duty for public authorities and public servants to tell the truth and, more importantly, challenge the culture of denial that far too often pervades public institutions.

Although it is a welcome step forward, the appointment of just two panel members to sit alongside the judge in the Grenfell inquiry, and only in phase two, is not enough. Panel members for the families must be brought into the heart of the inquiry right now. The legal representatives of bereaved families must be able to see all the evidence from the start and be allowed to question witnesses at hearings. Surely, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad), it is time to call in the commissioners at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. She raised many questions, which I hope the Minister answers.

Right from the start of this process, there have been too many failures to give families and victims the trust and hope they need in the system. If the Grenfell inquiry is to deliver truth and justice, the Grenfell survivors and bereaved families, more than anybody else, must have full confidence in it. Those necessary steps then might just start to build trust, and the Grenfell survivors, families and friends might not be left to climb the same long, obstacle-ridden route that the Hillsborough campaigners have had to travel, but instead be set on a path that leads swiftly to the truth and justice they deserve.

5.58 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): This was of course a tragedy—that goes without saying—but, as was put so powerfully by so many people, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), it was also a national shame. It was a disgrace. That it could have happened in our country is unthinkable. It is a matter of shame that we could not keep those people, many of whom came to our country, safe.

We cannot change the past, and nothing that we say or do in this debate can begin to mitigate or soothe the pain suffered by so many families. It is not intended to.

Our job is to focus like a laser on ensuring that justice is done, and specifically on ensuring that the inquiry is properly constituted. We have to ensure that one dreadful injustice is not replaced by another.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way.

Alex Chalk: No—I will in a second.

Notwithstanding the points powerfully made by the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad), I want to pay tribute to the dignity of the community in the face of unimaginable pain. Why? Because at the time it happened, I had a child who was five—I am not unusual; many people in the Chamber will have children—and I remember reading about the case of Isaac Paulos. I cannot say how I would have responded if it had been my child, but I doubt it would have been with such dignity.

I also pay tribute to the media, who have told the stories behind the statistics. I do not know whether anyone else in the Chamber read the story of Marco and Gloria, the Italian couple in their 20s who moved to London to find work as architects. Marco's family and friends have written a children's book, turning what happened into a fairytale. It is a story of unbearable poignancy, and just one of many tributes, but we must always remember that these are not statistics; these are people.

[*PHIL WILSON in the Chair*]

That, perhaps, all goes without saying. What is really important is that we add value in the debate. The conclusions drawn must have credibility and legitimacy, so we must strike the right balance, ensuring that the panel that considers these incredibly grave matters is not, on the one hand, unwieldy and slow or, on the other hand, too narrow as to lay itself open to the suggestion of having conclusions arrived at by individual whim.

There are precedents, as the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), the SNP spokesperson on justice affairs, showed. I remember the Hutton inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly. Its advantage, in one view, was that it considered matters quickly, between August 2003 and January 2004. However, as everyone in the Chamber remembers, when it published its findings, it had a credibility issue. We must ensure that we do not repeat that mistake.

Many in the Chamber will have spent time in the criminal courts, and we know that jury verdicts have their currency and legitimacy because juries are derived from the communities they serve. They do justice by reflecting the common sense and shared experience of people in everyday life. That ought to be the bedrock of how we go forward.

From my experience, just an appeal from a magistrates court in a relatively modest case will involve a judge and two lay assessors. That is why it is critical that the other members of the panel, which includes Mr Justice Moore-Bick, have decision-making power. They cannot simply be there to be thought of as making up the numbers; they must bring their weight of experience from the community and shared understanding. By the way, over many centuries lay people have shown themselves well able to analyse complex issues and do justice. To those

people who might suggest we have simply a single judge, it is no answer to say, “Oh, it’s too complicated, too difficult, too technical.” Lay people are capable of understanding—of course they are—as long as matters are properly presented, and I am sure they will be.

Having decided on that format, we must let the tribunal get on. There must be cool, forensic analysis of the evidence so that the answers we get are valid. Whatever the consequences that flow from the inquiry—consequences there will be—they must be built on solid ground. This is our task. This is our duty. We owe the victims nothing less.

6.3 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am pleased we are debating Grenfell—though it took 150,000 members of the public to bring us here—and I am also glad that we will debate it again on Wednesday, when it is the Labour party’s Opposition day debate subject. Speaking for myself and my constituents in Hammersmith and Shepherd’s Bush, we could debate it every day until we get justice for the bereaved, the dead and the survivors, and real assurance—not just words—that it will never happen again.

As a neighbouring constituency, we experienced Grenfell in three separate ways. First, we experienced it directly. I will never forget waking up at six o’clock that morning when Grenfell was still burning to hear messages on my phone telling me what had happened and watch it. I went down there later that day and spent most of the rest of the week there, to try—I do not think I was very useful—to give some moral support to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad). She has shown today that she does not really need that. At the time, I think she had been an MP for four days, and she dealt with it fantastically, as her speech, which pulled no punches, showed. Many of my constituents were there, including volunteers from the al-Muntada mosque in Parsons Green offering spiritual, moral and practical comfort every day. Many of my constituents watched Grenfell unfold from their own high-rise blocks, a mile or half a mile away. It affects us profoundly.

Secondly, it affects us as neighbours. Let me give an example. Our local authority offered help on the day in the form of accommodation and assistance but received no response. We found out later—we were not told—that 52 households were placed in budget hotels in Hammersmith and, nearly a year later, 17 of them are still there. Only six have been made permanent offers of accommodation. Those are real failings, and I cannot help but agree that even now—this is a party political point in a way—I wish the same faces were not still in charge in Kensington town hall, because I do not think they have learnt their lessons. There is still a role for commissioners if we are actually to take it as seriously as Government Members as well as Opposition Members say they wish to do. There were such singular failures by that authority, and they continue to this day.

Given the limited time, let me talk about two aspects—there are many others, particularly on the physical and mental health of survivors and the wider community—of the wider consequences: social housing and fire safety. Grenfell is the result of a systematic denigration and demoralisation of the social housing sector in this country over 30 years. We experience that in Hammersmith, where insecurity is introduced through short-term tenancies

and there no longer being a duty to discharge housing duty in the public sector. Social housing is second or third-class, so the people who lived there were ignored. Their views were not taken into account. What was good enough for them would not have been good enough for other people. That continues to happen.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) said, the sale of social housing properties is deliberately making the housing crisis worse, and none are being built. There has been no money for investment in social housing across London since 2010. Then we are surprised that the housing crisis is as bad as it is.

Let us look at fire safety, which has many aspects. I am still waiting for what I was promised six months ago: information on the cause of the fire. We know it started in a particular type of fridge-freezer in a particular flat. That is a common electrical fault that affects hundreds if not thousands of properties across London and the country, yet we know no more about that.

We know there are substantial problems with cladding and insulation, but the response on that has been entirely inadequate, as it has been on means of escape, and on other fire safety measures and advice such as the “stay put” policy. I do not regard the Royal Institute of British Architects as a radical left-wing organisation, but it is a good organisation and it has asked that we use only non-combustible cladding. Is that unreasonable? Yet I had an instance of a landlord who wanted to replace one type of partially combustible cladding that had failed a test with a type of partially combustible cladding that had passed a test. I am pleased to say that, in response to me and residents protesting, they backed down.

We need buildings with more than one means of escape, but in my constituency buildings on the Grenfell model of design have been proposed and approved since the fire happened. We need sprinkler systems in blocks, and not on the random basis of whether an authority can afford it.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andy Slaughter: If my hon. Friend does not mind, I will not, because there is very limited time.

We also need to stop this farce of desktop studies and all of that. It is insulting, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) said, that the Hackitt inquiry may propose business as usual, and the police inquiry, leaked to the *Standard*, may say, “It’s all the fault of the workmen who put the stuff up in the wrong way.” I am sorry; the fault will go far, far beyond that. And we are here today because even now the public inquiry has not got the full confidence of the residents. I support a public inquiry, doing a thorough investigation, but there are more urgent matters that need to be dealt with before that, in relation to social housing and fire safety. We need to get on with them. I have heard warm words today, and have been hearing them for the past year. Frankly they do not get us anywhere. What gets us somewhere is action, which is lacking at the moment. I hope we continue to debate the matter every day.

I apologise for the fact that I shall not be here for the winding-up speeches, Mr Wilson. I wanted to speak because of the close relationship I mentioned, but also,

[*Andy Slaughter*]

particularly, because I want to say that the debate must continue until the action we require is taken to ensure justice for Grenfell and the safety of the millions of people living in Grenfell-style conditions across this country.

6.10 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Wilson. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) for securing this important debate.

As a former fire officer with 31 years' service, I pay tribute to the bereaved and survivors of the Grenfell fire, and their tireless personal campaign for truth and justice. It is only through justice, answers and accountability that we can ensure that nothing like the Grenfell fire ever happens again, as has been said. I am pleased that the Government have at last listened and agreed to appoint additional panel members to the Grenfell Tower inquiry. That must be a welcome step, but I hope it will not be the final one.

I pay tribute to the London fire brigade and other emergency service personnel, whose response to the fire did much, I am sure, to save many lives. I can appreciate what a vast operation it must have been to bring that horrendous fire under control. We must ensure that the Grenfell community receives the support needed to rebuild lives. The previous Housing Secretary was right to denounce Kensington and Chelsea Council's slow progress on rehousing those who lost their homes in the fire, and I hope that his successor will redouble the Government's efforts to accelerate the council's response to those who need new homes.

It is already clear that a series of failings led to the needless, pointless deaths of 72 individuals last June. I understand that in November 2016, the Grenfell Action Group raised concerns about poor fire safety standards at Grenfell and predicted a catastrophe. It is clear that no one listened. The question is: "Who did not listen?" There are ample and tragic precedents for fires spreading rapidly up the exterior of tower blocks, owing to flammable or unsuitable cladding. In May 2017, the London Fire Brigade warned all London councils about the fire safety risk from external cladding, following a fire in Shepherd's Bush in 2016. Again, the question is who did not listen to the fire brigade.

It is essential that the Grenfell Tower inquiry, and also Dame Judith Hackitt's independent review of building regulations and fire safety, should get to the truth. They must be bold, transparent and wide-ranging. It is a question of truth and justice for the bereaved and survivors of the Grenfell fire. A weak or diluted inquiry and review would let the Grenfell community down, and lead to vital lessons not being learned.

As we speak here in Westminster Hall, thousands of people living in tower blocks across the United Kingdom are anxious about the safety of their homes. It is imperative that the inquiry and review set an agenda for change that will deliver justice for the Grenfell community, give tower block residents nationwide the safety and dignity they so richly deserve, and remind all authorities of the importance of fire safety. Fire safety should not play second fiddle to decoration and visual appearance, but should be the priority, where people live and work—and,

indeed, in some hospitals where I understand there are cladding issues. Lastly, the inquiry and review should make sure that the horrors of the Grenfell fire are never repeated.

I commend South Ayrshire Council, where I was formally a member, which has three tower blocks that are 42 years old, and which 15 years ago took the wise and important decision to retrofit sprinklers.

Finally, perhaps I may take the House back 45 years to August 1973 and the Summerland leisure complex fire on the Isle of Man, where there were 50 fatalities. It was a tragedy and I am sure that it haunts many to this day. In his book on that event, Dr Ian Phillips described it as

"one of the most forgotten and trivialised disasters in the post war history of the British Isles".

Neither Summerland nor Grenfell resembled their original designs and specifications at the time of the tragic fires. In the case of Summerland, that was because it was heavily modified—those concerned changed their mind while it was being built. In the case of Grenfell it was because of the recent refurbishment and modifications, and the failure to listen to residents' concerns. At Summerland the fire spread rapidly, aided by the poor fire resistance of Galbestos cladding and Oroglas sheeting that formed part of the walls and roof of the seven-storey leisure complex. The nation has clearly never paid heed to the Summerland fire tragedy. We must pay heed to Grenfell.

6.16 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I want to speak about my experience of meeting Grenfell survivors in Speaker's House last week. I spoke to people who had lost family, and was impressed by the dignity of their reaction. I spoke to a man called Antonio, who had survived the Grenfell Tower fire. Having lived to tell the tale, he wanted to speak to me about his experience. I hope that the House will bear with me as I describe something of what he went through.

Antonio was nodding off when he suddenly got a text from a family member telling him that the tower was on fire. He was on the 10th floor and had not realised it was on fire, but when he looked out of the window he saw thick black smoke circulating outside. He was not sure what to do, and decided to try to escape down the main stairwell. As he tried to do that, he realised that the smoke was so thick that there was no way he could survive. He said he felt he would have choked if he had gone down the stairs, so he went back to his room.

Hon. Members will be able to imagine Antonio's agony while he waited there. He said he thought about whether he would ever see his friends and family again, so he tried once more to go down the main stairwell and escape from the burning tower. Once again he saw the thick smoke and realised there was no way he could go down the stairs. He decided once again to go back to his room—unsure this time whether he would make it out.

Then, at 6 am, our firefighters came and saved Antonio. They took him outside and he was reunited with his son, whom he lives with on the 10th floor. He told me that after the tragedy and upheaval he had faced, and the dreadful wait in that room, unsure whether he would live or die, he was put in a temporary hotel. He asked the council when he would get a permanent home and was promised that it would take three weeks.

Those three weeks came and went and Antonio was not placed anywhere. He was passed from pillar to post, hotel to hotel and temporary accommodation. Then he was promised that he and his son would get a permanent home by Christmas. The House needs to bear in mind that Antonio and his son were not even together but were in separate temporary accommodation; but he looked forward to being with his son in December. Christmas came and went and he was still not placed in a permanent home. He went back to the council, which said, “If you give us six months we will make sure that you are placed in a permanent home.”

Not only had Antonio had to suffer the fire, and the loss of friends, families and neighbours; he also did not have a permanent home to go to. That is why I appeal to Ministers today to say that we have already failed the Grenfell survivors, and the people who did not survive, once, and that we cannot fail them again by not giving them permanent homes. I make a plea for the council to be held to account on the promises it made, and for the promises of permanent homes to be carried out. The statistics about one in three households not getting permanent accommodation, and a further third being in hotels, can wash over the people who read them, but meeting someone who lived through the fire and still does not have permanent accommodation leads to the realisation of the impact on their lives.

In the time remaining to me, I want to talk about Richard Stone, who has been mentioned a few times. He was an advisor to the judge in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. I have known him since I was a teenager. The inquiry dominated a large part of Richard’s life. I see him often and he has spoken to me about it many times in the past 20 years. He has said that in his mind the inquiry served a few purposes. The first was justice—justice for the family of Stephen Lawrence, but also for all the young black men out there who had faced institutional racism. In the same way, this inquiry must be about justice—not only for the people who died in Grenfell Tower and the families and friends who are still mourning their loss, but for all those families who live in high-rise buildings in London and around the country, and who feel so unsafe.

Anecdotally, I have had Bangladeshi families from across the country emailing me. Many hon. Members will have heard the tragic story of two Bangladeshi young people who refused to leave their elderly parents in Grenfell Tower. Their elderly parents could not move and they did not want to leave them, so they died along with them. Bangladeshi families who live in tower blocks have been emailing me to say that they feel unsafe.

The second thing Richard Stone keeps coming back to is how the inquiry must look into the institutional and systemic failures in society. The Stephen Lawrence inquiry was about institutional racism; here, it is about our collective failure to make people feel safe in tower blocks and the fact that we have not tested the claddings in tower blocks and private blocks across the country.

In Camden, we did test one of our high-rise blocks. There was immense disruption to residents, but the council took them out and replaced the cladding. It cost £40 million, but you cannot put a price on people’s lives, and now people are back there. We know that we caused immense disruption to the residents, but it was the right

thing to do, because if we want to address this failure, we have to test the cladding in all tower blocks and not just in a few.

Finally, Richard Stone comes back to one thing over and over when he talks about the Stephen Lawrence inquiry: that there is no point in conducting an inquiry such as this if it is just about giving politicians a pat on the back, saying we are doing it because we have to, making ourselves look good or getting votes. The reason why we do it is that we want to address the injustice of what has happened. If the Government do not commit now to implementing the report’s findings, there is no point in having an inquiry. The whole point of implementing the findings of a report is to show that all lives matter, that black lives matter and that, whether people live in a mansion in Chelsea or a tower block in Kensington, all lives are equal for us politicians in this room.

6.21 pm

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): I absolutely agree with everything my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) has just said. I rise to say that we in this place should be ashamed at the lack of progress that has been made to date. Saying that it can never happen again and saying to the survivors, “We understand and we’re here to support you” cannot just be warm words.

Everything that Grenfell United has had to do to date should make us feel ashamed. The fact that there was a bell-mourning service for Big Ben but not to mourn the lives of people who have died, the fact that it had to ask for a service to be held to remember those who lost their lives, the fact that it had to set up an e-petition to say, “Let’s make this inquiry fair and independent”—all that is absolutely disgusting. We should be ashamed.

We have had promise after promise, so why, 11 months on, are families still not housed? We had a chance to meet and speak to the Grenfell survivors at Speaker’s House, but why did they have to ask whether they could come along and share their experiences—share with us that they had to escape from this and the lives that have been lost? Still we have questions about whether it should be now or phase two. That is completely unacceptable.

I feel that we are elected to this place to be a voice for those we represent. We are elected to speak to those in power and to make change come about for those we are elected to serve. The fact that they have had to fight—fight when they should have time to grieve and to be there with their loved ones, fight for accommodation, fight for their voices to be heard, fight for an inquiry, fight for people to be put on a panel—is completely unacceptable. I rise to say, in this short period of time, that we can do more, we can do better and, if we want this never to happen again, we must implement the recommendations that are made.

If recommendations such as those made after the Lakanal House fire had been implemented, we would not be in this position today and people would not have needlessly lost their lives. I ask—I implore—the Government: you can do something. Do not sit back and say warm words about how this could be different, how you care and how you want this never to happen again. Do something.

6.24 pm

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): I am honoured to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya) and I agree with every word she has said. Many people here have spoken about the dignity with which the victims and survivors of Grenfell have spoken, but why should they have to hold it together in trying to persuade this place to take action? Why do they not have the time to grieve for the people they have lost, their families, friends and loved ones? To hold it together, to come to Speaker's House, to persuade and fight for this Government to act—that should not have to be the case, and I am very sorry it has been.

I will make two practical points and one broader point. First is an issue that many hon. Members have spoken about: the appalling lack of action on rehousing those who have lost their homes in Grenfell. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) pointed out that 72 households are still living in hotel rooms and 64 are still in temporary accommodation. Even worse than that is the fact that over half of those families have accepted permanent accommodation, but they cannot move into it because it is not ready.

That is 68 houses. Are you telling me that with all the money, influence and power not just of the council, but of the national Government, we could not get those homes ready for people to move into? Where there is a will, there is a way. The problem is that there does not appear to be the will to sort out those 68 homes for people who have already accepted that accommodation. What is the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea doing? How hard can it be? I hope the Minister will answer that question at the end of the debate.

Secondly, I follow up on the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) made about the children who have been affected—who have lost not just their parents, but their sisters, their brothers, their cousins, their friends and their neighbours. This has affected the whole community in that area. I do not believe that either the council or the Government have understood just how widely and deeply it has affected people.

I have heard from the Grenfell families their real concern that, when children wanted to go to visit the tower because it would help them to grieve and to say goodbye, they were told they could not go because it was not safe. They were not asking for the children to go inside, just to go and look and say goodbye, and to feel close to the people they loved. The state knows best—but it did not in this case.

On the point about education, I am deeply concerned that families have had to fight to get the catch-up help they need for their children. We have to put that extra investment into those children, so that they can live as normal a life as possible, fulfil their hopes, dreams and potential, and become the people they want to be. I ask the Minister to look at that again, too.

Thirdly, on mental health, I know that many child and adolescent mental health services advisers have been put in place, but my concern is over the much longer term. If someone ends up needing a physical operation as a child, on their heart or their limbs, they

get follow-up support throughout their life, because we know that those physical impacts early on have a big impact later in life. Where is that help and support for the mental health of those children in the longer term?

My final point, which many other hon. Members have made, is that there is nothing—nothing—to be feared from putting the families at the heart of this process. In fact, quite the reverse: there is everything to be gained, because we will not get to the bottom of what happened or have a proper plan to put things right in future unless the families are front and centre. Do not repeat the mistakes of the past. We have heard from many hon. Members about Hillsborough. We know what went wrong there. Do not repeat those mistakes. It is actions, not words, that matter. I hope the Government will act.

6.29 pm

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): I thank all the people who signed the petition, which has given us the chance to put our demands to the Government on behalf of the bereaved people of Grenfell Tower and the wider community in Kensington. It is always people outside this place rather than Members themselves that push it to progress.

To be honest, like many others Members have said, it should not be this difficult to secure a debate to convey to the Government the demands of survivors. It should not have taken a petition or the precious energies of campaign groups for those to be heard. Everything I have seen about this horrific incident shows that that is part of a pattern. The people in Grenfell Tower were not, and are still not, listened to. They were not listened to before their homes were destroyed and they were not listened to in the immediate aftermath, nor in the months that followed.

It is clear that the lives of Grenfell Tower residents were placed at risk, not only because of the refurbishment—residents warned that it was shoddy and that corners were being cut—but because of the ongoing management of the block. I cannot seem to get over the fact that residents repeatedly warned that the building was unsafe. They produced a long list of issues that needed to be addressed, yet nobody listened. I was told outside that there was a group that blogged about their concerns for five years before the fire. Imagine the worry of someone going to bed each night knowing that, although they had done everything within their power to keep their family safe, their home was not safe and that nobody would listen.

Why is it only when death occurs on a huge scale that these people's calls become significant or newsworthy? What is it about our society and the system we live in that judges working class people's voices as so meaningless that they are only given weight and validity or heard on their death? Even that has been a fight. I would like for us to consider for one second how these people would have been treated if they were the wealthiest residents of Kensington and Chelsea. In fact, would this have happened at all if they were the wealthiest residents?

Why is it that the Government and Kensington and Chelsea council do not just give these people every single thing that they want without a fight? Why is it taking a battle to get a process that residents have confidence in, and that they believe will deliver justice

and truth? When confidence is so low—understandably, after everything we have heard today—how can Ministers not see that what they think is appropriate in this situation is actually irrelevant? The only thing that is relevant, and the only experts, as has been said, are the residents of Grenfell Tower and the surrounding communities.

I do not believe that any Member here has ever experienced their home being burned to the ground or their gravest concerns being ignored by the state, or has ever had to rely completely on the state to get them and their family out of a hotel room and into a home. Why do these people, who know so much about their own situation, have to go through such a battle, on top of their grief and having to rebuild their lives? That is against the backdrop of deregulation, cost cutting, gentrification and the demolition of democratically controlled local housing, and of complex, distant and unaccountable tenant management organisations and cuts to fire safety inspectors. My own area of North West Durham is a long way from Grenfell Tower, but we have lost 50% of our fire safety inspectors since 2010. We do not have great tower blocks like Grenfell Tower, but we have huge concerns over that.

On top of that, the demands of generations of people have not been listened to. Those demands are modest, to say the least. What they ask for must be granted by the Government and the council. If not, the Government and the council will let those people down and, I believe, will re-traumatise them. That would only confirm what working-class people up and down the country have come to believe: the state and the Government actively work against their interests, even when they are in the most difficult of circumstances.

All they ask for is an independent expert panel, akin to the one afforded to the Macpherson inquiry, and that that panel is representative. The two members announced on Friday is a start, but it is not enough, and it should not have taken all this time to do such a simple thing. They also want a guarantee that all residents will have a permanent home by the one-year anniversary. If that does not happen, action should be taken against Kensington and Chelsea Council—action that is proportionate to the failings of the people responsible for Grenfell Tower.

As has been said by many Members, the deadline to re-house survivors has been moved time and again, as if it does not matter at all to the council or the Government. People are still living in hotel rooms, their lives on hold. I believe that, if there was enough care, they would have permanent homes, and this bureaucracy would not be preventing them from moving on. The hundreds of times we have returned to our homes since the Grenfell Tower fire is a luxury not afforded to those people who, through no fault of their own, lost everything on that night. A year to rectify that is simply not good enough.

The bereaved people's legal representatives should be able to see all the evidence—from the start of the inquiry, and should have access to all the documents relating to the inquiry. They should be given whatever they need to properly represent their clients. Finally, we want a commitment from the Government that they will implement in full all the inquiry's recommendations, and not pick and choose those that are most convenient.

I fully support the demands of the people of Grenfell Tower and Kensington. I hope the Government will do the right thing and announce today that they will grant

all those people's wishes. What a terrible disaster in the history of our nation. Living in one of the richest countries in the world means absolutely nothing if those riches are diverted from communities. As somebody—I wish I knew his name; I will find it out—so eloquently said at the protest outside, “The Government need to defend, represent and listen to the people and not the market—for once.”

6.36 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I fully agree with the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) that the time for fine words and sympathies is up.

However, I must admit that I was fortunate enough to meet some of the survivors and the bereaved from Grenfell Tower last week. It was a most moving experience, and I admire the courageous individuals who have experienced terrible tragedy and are now fighting so that a tragedy like Grenfell will never happen again. It is shocking that justice has not been given to them without a fight. For years, the residents of Grenfell Tower were disregarded and ignored, and they were failed by those whose duty it was to protect them, yet they still need to fight.

The only acceptable outcome now is that the Government listen to every concern of the victims of Grenfell Tower and commit fully to implementing the outcomes of the public inquiry. I echo everything that hon. Members have said on that. The Prime Minister's announcement last week to accept two extra members on to the panel was welcome, but it has to be properly seen through—with the full agreement of the residents at all stages—and increased if necessary.

Without pre-empting the outcome of the inquiry, the lessons of the Grenfell tragedy are very clear. We must ensure that tenants and residents across the UK are listened to when they raise concerns regarding the quality of their housing. To ensure that residents are listened to, there must be clear channels of accountability. The Government need to improve awareness of how tenants can raise complaints effectively, and there should be means of redress when action is not taken.

I am encouraged by Dame Hackitt's interim report, which criticises the systemic lack of responsibility and enforcement within building regulations. The current system is completely broken, with builders and developers specifying and then signing off their own work. That cannot be right. Currently, decisions are made that prioritise price at the expense of people's wellbeing and, ultimately, their lives. That cannot be right.

Grenfell Tower was a symptom of the failure of successive Governments to invest in quality social housing. We cannot leave social housebuilding and maintenance to the private sector. Until the Government take radical action in building the quality and quantity of social homes that this country so desperately needs, many of the problems highlighted by the Grenfell tragedy will remain.

The terrible tragedy of last year must serve as a call to action. We must fight for tenants' rights, wholesale reform of building regulations and investment in social housing. Most importantly, we must continue to speak up in the House for the victims of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. One in three Grenfell households are still living in hotel rooms, and a further third in temporary accommodation. More than half the Grenfell families

[Wera Hobhouse]

who are still in hotels or temporary accommodation have accepted permanent accommodation, but have been unable to move in because of council delays. That is not acceptable. The tragedy of Grenfell Tower must never happen again, but the timid and inadequate response of Kensington and Chelsea Council is not good enough. We must call for action to be taken. The time for fine words is up.

6.40 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Wilson, and to follow all the fine contributions to this debate. I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) on securing the debate and on reading into the record the names of those we lost. It is very important that he did so. I know so little about who those people were, but I hope that in due course we will all come to know much more about them. It was an honour to meet relatives of the deceased in Speaker's House—I think we all felt that. I am sure that we will come to know them very well in this place.

I am the Member of Parliament for Wirral South, but from 2006 to 2010 I was the councillor in the London Borough of Southwark for the Brunswick Park ward, which contained the Sceaux Gardens estate, in the middle of which was Lakanal House. On 3 July 2009, Lakanal went up in flames. I can see that block in my mind's eye as real as if it were that day. Six people, including a one-month-old baby, died in that disaster, and the inquest found that those were unnecessary and preventable deaths. We have heard people in this debate say that the Grenfell fire must never happen again. To me, those words are meaningless, because it has happened again—it is happening again. I saw Grenfell on the television, and to me it was alarmingly familiar. I have seen what the families have gone through since the day of the Grenfell Tower disaster. That, too, is alarmingly familiar, because unfortunately neither the disaster nor the secondary tragedy of the Government's response to the disaster needed to happen.

Other hon. Members have talked persuasively about the recommendations following the Lakanal fire. It is a matter of great grief to all of us who were involved with Lakanal that the recommendations and the conclusions of the inquest were not progressed with more rigour. But there is something else. The Prime Minister, when she was Home Secretary, commissioned Bishop James Jones to report on the experience of the Hillsborough families. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) has talked about how all of this discussion and debate rings bells with us because it is all the same. Bishop James Jones's report on the experience of the Hillsborough families was called "The patronising disposition of unaccountable power". I would ask any person to listen to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) and ask whether what she described does not amount to the patronising disposition of unaccountable power. Of course it does. Hillsborough was not about football and the Grenfell disaster was not about a tower block in isolation: it was about the relationship between citizens and the state that was supposed to protect and respect them. Of course a diverse panel for the inquiry, for all the reasons that hon. Members have gone through,

was vital, but we need more, and I will spend just a couple of minutes saying what more the Government can do.

First, the Government should answer Bishop James Jones's call for a charter for families bereaved through public tragedy. In his report, he gives all the details of what that should contain. The report came out in November, but the Government have not responded. All this could have been avoided if they had.

Secondly, the Government should bring forward their own Bill on a public advocate at inquests. That proposal was brought forward by Michael Wills, a peer, and the Government are committed to implementing it. Just bring forward the Bill. Let us reform inquests now; let us not wait another second.

The third issue is the Hillsborough law proposals, which were first put to this House by my friend, Mayor Andy Burnham. Those proposals include reform of legal aid so that we get the parity of arms to which the Scottish National party spokesperson, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), alluded. The importance of that is absolutely clear. I worry greatly that we will again get into a situation in which families are worrying about legal costs and whether their legal advice will be sustained, while the state has all before it—whatever expensive QC it needs. Let us prevent that from happening now before the problem arises.

Fourthly, and most important to me, is a duty of candour. This is not party political. The Government have already implemented a duty of candour for NHS staff, but I want to change the situation in every council and every Government Department up and down the country, where people are told, "Don't admit you were wrong. Don't accept responsibility. Don't give the information out. Don't make it publicly available. Because you will be liable." I want the lawyers to say to them, "You know what? You'll be liable if you don't tell the truth. You'll be liable if you don't give the information out." Trust the public.

The Government, as I have said, accept the policy for the NHS. Let us just make it real for every other representative of the state in our country, because in the end the central question that we have to ask ourselves is this: what kind of country do we want to live in? Who are we really as British people? Are we the kind of people who see grieving families and want to worry about whether we might be responsible, or are we, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) said, the kind of people who want to reach out and help? I thought that our country had changed radically since 1989. I worry that I was wrong.

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Before we hear from the Front Benchers, I say to them that I would like to leave two or three minutes for Paul Scully to sum up the debate.

6.47 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I rise to speak on behalf of the Scottish National party, which is the third party in this Chamber and the principal party in Scotland, but I think I speak on behalf of the overwhelming majority of people in Scotland when I place on the record our support for the Grenfell campaigners in trying to get to the bottom of what was visited upon them.

We watched in horror at the scenes unfolding on our television screens on 14 June last year, conscious of the unimaginable terrors that were being visited upon the people trapped inside Grenfell Tower. In the months that have passed since then, that sense of horror has given way to a sense of solidarity, and a desire to stand with the people of Grenfell as they try to get the answers to questions that they so richly deserve. I associate my party and myself with the comments of the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad), and I take her advice about how it is very easy in a debate on this matter—indeed, we have witnessed people doing this—to get platitudinous in describing the campaigners. I do want to make one point, though. I have observed how the Grenfell campaigners have prosecuted their case, and it seems to me that they have a level of integrity that is head and shoulders above those from whom they are seeking redress, and that is highly commendable.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, most hon. Members here who also represent urban constituencies were concerned about another question as well. Could it happen again and could it happen in their area? That preoccupied many of us. In my own city of Edinburgh, there are 44 high-rise tower blocks managed by the local authority and another 80 in the private sector. I commend the work of the officers of the city council and the fire service, who very swiftly did a review. It was not a desk review but an inspection on the ground, and it concluded that the materials that had been used in the Grenfell cladding were not in use in my city, for which I am grateful.

I am grateful also that the Scottish Government have undertaken a review of safety regulations in tower blocks, trying to improve on the 2005 fire regulations, which are already more stringent than those that apply in the rest of the United Kingdom. I cannot be satisfied, however, that it will not happen again—that would be complacent—until we know the outcome of this inquiry, until the questions about how and why this happened, and what needs to be done to ensure it does not happen again, are put in the public sphere. That is why I support those campaigners in fighting for the widest and most effective inquiry possible.

I want to address the points that the petitioners have made. A lot of people have talked about the welcome news that the Prime Minister has decided to widen the leadership of the inquiry process and appoint advisers. Like others, however, I am bemused that it has taken months of campaigning, parliamentary debates and 150,000 people signing an e-petition to grant what is surely the most reasonable request in these circumstances. I say to Government Ministers—I invite them to respond—that it is critical who these appointees are. It is incumbent on the Government to ensure that whoever is put in the position to advise and support the chair of this inquiry not only must have empathy with the survivors of Grenfell and the relatives of those who paid the ultimate price in this tragedy, to understand and know what those people are going through, but must have the confidence of the Grenfell community. If the Government allow the inquiry to go ahead without those leading it having the confidence of the people at the centre of this matter, it will be stillborn and we will repeat the circuitous history of previous inquiries in this country. We have been down that path before. This is an opportunity to get it right.

The petitioners' second point is about what is happening right now to the people who survived. I find it unbelievable that nearly a year later there are so many people languishing in temporary accommodation, who have not yet been given a proper, permanent roof over their heads after undergoing this horror. I just do not understand it. I say to those who mentioned the unfortunate term “political football”, I am not making a political football of this, but to pretend that this can be divorced from policy and political considerations is naivety bordering on the irresponsible. Questions have to be asked of the people who are in charge of public administration in Kensington and Chelsea about what is happening.

The historical context is apt here. It is no coincidence that Kensington and Chelsea has always been one of the boroughs in the country with the lowest proportion of public housing. I will put this in words that the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) might agree with. I do not want to make this a party political football, but let us put it this way. It is clear that the majority of people who have the fortune to live in Kensington and Chelsea are relatively well off and content. Public administration in the borough is being executed by, and in the interests of, those people, who are well off and relatively content. The needs of those who are at the other end of this unequal society are not being adequately listened to and put into public policy. I cannot see any other reason why these people would have not been rehoused almost a year later.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) mentioned the right to buy, which is not irrelevant either. I do not condemn or criticise the people who bought their council house over the last 20 years, but I condemn the people who sold it to them, because they did so without any regard for the consequences of that policy. The consequence of it now is that there is not enough housing to go around. When a catastrophe such as this happens, the public authority is unable to respond to it. That is not good enough.

I wondered just how difficult rehousing those people would be, even if we had to rely on the public sector. I have asked colleagues, “Why don't they just buy some houses in the private sector?” That is what local authorities used to do. It was explained to me how difficult and expensive it all was. I checked, therefore, on the way to this debate. It is true that some of the house prices in Kensington and Chelsea border on the obscene. There are dozens of places available to buy in excess of £20 million. But I put into the filter on rightmove.co.uk this question: how many family-sized properties—two bedrooms or greater—are there today in Kensington and Chelsea on the market at a price tag of less than £1 million, which is a reasonable price for central London? The answer is that today in Kensington and Chelsea there are 512 properties on sale, which could house these families, so I suggest that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea goes and buys some of those houses and moves these people into them.

The question, however, is for Ministers, because this has been going on for nearly a year. We need to hear that Ministers are prepared to set a deadline on the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, by which time it must provide a plan for the permanent rehousing of every one of the Grenfell survivors. If that deadline is not met, it is incumbent on the Government to take

[Tommy Sheppard]

the matter into their own hands and ensure that this is delivered. They can no longer hide behind the inadequate excuse of leaving it to the local authority.

The petitioners' final point is about the need to listen to the inquiry's conclusions. I do not want to pre-empt them, but I seek assurances from the Minister in two regards. First, if the inquiry demonstrates that there is a need to change policy on housing provision, financing and regulation in this country, will he commit to bringing forward legislation to enact those recommendations? Secondly, if the inquiry finds, as many suspect it will, that the real problem is not in the original construction of the tower block, but in the re-cladding that took place between 2014 and 2016, and the decisions that were made, which arguably put price above the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals, then I want an assurance from the Government that those responsible will face the consequences of their actions, and that they will be charged and subject to criminal proceedings, if it is relevant to do so. I hope the Government will give us those assurances.

To conclude, the one good thing in all this is that, because of the experience that these people have been through, we have an organised community that is sceptical and critical, and which will keep an eye on this inquiry, and come back to us in this place and get our support anytime that they need it. Not only do they speak for the people of Grenfell; the actions they are taking to ensure that this inquiry works will benefit all the people of this country.

6.57 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. We are having this debate for one reason only, namely the tireless campaigning by the bereaved families and the survivors, and the overwhelming public support they attracted as a result. The e-petition, signed by over 150,000 people, forced this debate, and we should be clear that it forced the Prime Minister's welcome shift from her previous position on Friday, when she granted a panel of some description in the Grenfell inquiry.

That is testament to the efforts of the bereaved families and survivors, but after everything they have been through, they should never have had to wage such a campaign. Far too often in this country, politics seem to act as a dam holding justice back, rather than helping justice to flow. Hillsborough, Stephen Lawrence and Bloody Sunday are all examples of when the state did not use its great powers to deliver truth and justice, but instead blocked truth and justice for years and years. In all of those cases, the state was accused of a cover-up by those affected. Distrust was sown. We cannot allow Grenfell to join that list.

Race, class and power are at the heart of this. Justice delayed is justice denied, so it is essential that the Grenfell inquiry gets it right first time, but it has got off to a rocky start. Most people will find it frankly unacceptable that to get justice, the bereaved and survivors of Grenfell have had to hold marches and organise rallies, petitions and lobbies, when they are still in shock about the horrific events that they witnessed and lived through, when they have lost everything, and when they are still trying to rebuild their lives and secure a home, as we have heard.

Friday's decision to grant a panel of some description can be a stepping stone to justice, but for that to be the case, we need to be clear that it is not the end point, but a staging post. It needs the Government to draw the wider lesson. It must win the hearts and minds of those affected by the Grenfell fire.

A public inquiry aims to get to the truth as a key step to delivering justice. No inquiry can ever achieve that if it does not have the trust of those directly affected, and no inquiry can ever assume that it will automatically have that trust, nor can it demand it. Trust must always be earned. That is why the demands for an inquiry panel were important, and why it became a totemic issue for the full confidence of the bereaved, the survivors and the wider public.

From the start, survivors said that they wanted a panel to help to tackle the obvious distrust. It was always a reasonable demand. As we have heard, the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, which marked a watershed in uncovering institutional racism, had a similar type of panel overseeing it. As we have also heard, that panel reflected a wealth of relevant experience. That diversity was its strength, as Lord Macpherson later stated. That legitimacy led to calls for widespread change, which must be replicated with the Grenfell inquiry, but the demand for Grenfell was ignored, misrepresented and then denied. That further damaged trust and confidence.

Trust would have been stronger had the panel been granted when the demand was first made 10 months ago. Trust would have been stronger had the Prime Minister not waited until just days before Christmas to formally reject the panel. Now it has been granted, however, it needs to be a sign that the Government are going to behave differently. The ball is in the court of the Government, and specifically of the Prime Minister, who is the Minister nominated under the Inquiries Act 2005.

The Government have taken a step in the right direction, but lots of questions remain unanswered. I will put those questions to the Minister, and hopefully he can give me guarantees. I will also write to him later and, with the inquiry set to restart very soon, I hope that I will get an answer within seven days. As mentioned earlier, on Wednesday, there is an Opposition day debate on Grenfell and housing. If we do not get answers quickly, there will be an Opposition day debate on the inquiry itself.

Much of the discussion has focused on the panel, but I want to make an important clarification. We are here to debate not just the panel, but the whole petition launched by affected families and backed by 150,000 signatories. That petition is entitled, "Call on PM to take action to build public trust in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry". As well as a panel, it asks that,

"Legal representatives of bereaved families see all evidence from the start & are allowed to question witnesses at the hearings".

I would argue that we have had a partial response to one of the petition's demands. We need answers to much more. Why is the panel going to sit only in phase two of the inquiry? What if the panel members need to revisit issues in phase one? Where are we with the second demand in the public petition about survivors' lawyers having all the evidence from the start? Just a tiny fraction of the material has been disclosed to lawyers so far. Where are we with lawyers being able to cross-examine

the witnesses, as happened in the Lawrence inquiry? The families cannot be expected to negotiate with the Prime Minister through public campaigns and petitions, so we need to know.

What formal mechanisms are there for bereaved family members and survivors to request more panel members? What formal mechanisms are there to guarantee the ongoing confidence of survivors and of the bereaved family members in the inquiry? How do they make formal requests and what is the formal public way of responding? We need greater clarity from the Government on all those things. As one family member said to me: “We must do what is necessary, not what is convenient.” There must be no repeat of the delays and denials we have seen in recent months. The Government must meet all the demands of survivors and of the bereaved.

In bringing my remarks to a close, I will highlight a key flaw in the current inquiry process. We are relying on the Prime Minister, who is the Minister nominated under the 2005 Act, as I mentioned, to do the right thing, but surely justice should not be about the conscience or whims of one person, however powerful. Surely justice should be a right. That is why I urge the Government to press on with the Hillsborough law, which the bereaved Hillsborough families advanced as a way of preventing what happened to them from happening to others. I hope the Government will provide parliamentary time and support for the passage of such a Bill into law. Martin Luther King once said:

“Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.”

We need to ensure that our laws serve justice and are not seen as a block to justice.

7.7 pm

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): The Chamber has been packed with MPs from all sides, as it was when many of us gathered together two days after the disaster in this very room, frankly stunned by the enormity of what had happened in north Kensington and what was unfolding before our eyes. Some MPs have not had an opportunity to speak. Next to me is the Minister for the Constitution, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), and opposite me is the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott).

Those campaigning for this change and the many bereaved and survivors—the victims of the Grenfell Tower disaster—can be in no doubt about the attention and focus that this place gives to Grenfell and to the journey towards truth, justice and healing. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) on setting the tone so well at the start of the debate by reading out in such a poignant way the names of the 71 precious lives lost. He was quite right to add to that list the name of Maria Del Pilar Burton, who very sadly died earlier this year.

When we met almost 11 months ago, we were reeling. This afternoon, we meet clearer about what we are dealing with. In terms of loss of life, we are dealing with the worst disaster to hit this country since Hillsborough. We are dealing with a disaster that should not have happened. Those 71 precious lives should not have been lost that night. The lives of their friends and families

should not have been torn apart by trauma and grief. More than 300 people should not have been made homeless—most of them losing all their possessions. Local residents who did not live in the tower should not have been traumatised by what they saw and heard that night, which will stay with them forever.

First responders have not been mentioned so far, but police, fire and ambulance staff should not have had to face what they had to face that night to keep the peace and save lives, often at huge risk to themselves. Grenfell will always be part of their lives.

Since then, of course, thousands of people have stepped up to try to help, either because they are part of the extraordinary voluntary effort or because it is their job and their duty. Grenfell will always be part of our lives. Of course, for all of us, as expressed so powerfully this afternoon and before in Parliament and through the media, there remains profound shock and horror across the country that such a disaster could happen in modern Britain.

Given all that, we cannot put everything right, but as a country we can and must do at least three things. First, we must honour the dead in the most appropriate way. I thank those people—many of them are sitting in the Public Gallery this afternoon—who have worked with us on the first steps of a process that I believe will lead to a beautiful and appropriate memorial on the site of the tower, which is a journey with the community at the driving wheel and the voice of the bereaved carrying the most weight.

Secondly, we must do everything we can to help the bereaved, the survivors and the traumatised residents to heal, and to rebuild their lives and—as far as is possible—their hope. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) was absolutely right that that must be done in a way that is human at all times and not bureaucratic and remote. Have we succeeded in that fully? No. But that must be our continued aim. For the homeless, that means settling in new homes that they like and that they feel safe in.

Can I expect the House to have full understanding of all the underlying complexity? No, of course not. It is absolutely right to express frustration, rage and disappointment at the pace of progress. In fact, the Government have put on the record our profound dissatisfaction with the pace of progress.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that, when we started this process, of the category A households—residents of the tower and the walk—210 needed to be rehoused, and we are now in a situation where the number of households in emergency accommodation who have still not accepted offers is down to nine. That is nine households too many and nine households that I am personally committed to trying to sit down with and meet personally, to understand how they are feeling, but it would be wrong to say that no progress has been made or that no action has been taken.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: I will give way to the hon. Lady, who did not have a chance to speak earlier.

Stella Creasy: I thank the Minister for giving way. Nobody here can doubt his commitment, but he has just said that the Government have put on the record

[Stella Creasy]

their frustration. Can the Government put some resources behind resolving this question, so that we do not have to listen to more stories of people who have been through something horrific and are still without settled accommodation?

Mr Hurd: With respect to the hon. Lady, it is not an issue of resources; there is no shortage of resource that has been directed to this problem. If she happens to drill down into the underlying details of every single case, she will see that it is not an issue of resource. It is an issue of a deep underlying complexity about some of the things that are still getting in the way of a victim of the disaster finding the home that they feel is right for them and that they feel secure in, which ultimately is all that matters.

Last but not least—it is the theme of this debate—we must deliver truth, we must deliver accountability and we must deliver justice, because we must ensure that such a disaster never happens again, so that no family has to go through this hell.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I suggest to the Minister that it is absolutely vital that victims, the families of victims and the wider community have some faith in the process in terms of finding the truth, and that we as a Government do all we can to give buy-in and credibility to the people, who are the most important piece of this whole problem and tragedy.

Mr Hurd: I agree 100% with my hon. Friend. I have said it before and I will say it again: I spend a large part of my working day trying to do exactly that. We have to deliver truth, accountability and justice, not least because without those things the victims cannot heal and we cannot heal after the trauma of this terrible disaster.

I believe that the Prime Minister did speak for the whole country when she said last June that the public inquiry must

“get to the truth about what happened and who was responsible, and to provide justice for the victims and their families who suffered so terribly.”—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2017; Vol. 626, c. 168.]

This debate is not about the destination; it is about how we get there in a way that those who are the most important and most affected by the disaster feel comfortable with.

I join with others, notwithstanding the entreaties of the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad), in paying my own personal tribute to the highly dignified way in which the victims of this disaster, not least as represented by Grenfell United, have resisted—let us be frank about this—attempts at the start of this process to agitate and cause unrest. They have resisted that and said, “That is not for us. We are going to conduct ourselves with dignity and peace. We are going to march silently and we are going to make our case. And we are going to make an argument.” They have won that argument. I have sat alongside the Prime Minister as she has listened to many of the people sitting at the back of Westminster Hall today while they have made their argument. They have won that argument, and I congratulate them on that.

Many people have argued, “Oh well, this is a straightforward thing. She should have given it a long time ago.” It is not straightforward. Changing the structure of a public inquiry is a big deal. It is a big decision. Let us be frank as well: there are also good reasons to set up an inquiry and to put it in the hands of a single judge, one with a tremendous reputation for integrity and forensic ability. There are good reasons for doing that, but the Prime Minister made it very clear that she would keep that decision under review, and she has done exactly that. She has the power to review the make-up of the inquiry panel at any time during the inquiry and she has done that. She has listened very carefully to the argument; as I said, I have sat next to her as she has done that and I know exactly the demeanour that she took into those meetings. However, she has also looked at the scope of phase two, and recognised its growth and complexity.

Phase two of the inquiry will look at original design, construction and subsequent modifications of the tower; the inspections carried out during the modifications; the governance and management of the tower; the communications between the residents of the tower and the council and the tenant management organisation before the fire; what fire advice was given to the residents; how central and local Government responded to recommendations relevant to the risk; and how central and local government and the tenant management organisation responded to the aftermath of the fire. As we get into this process, there are more and more suggestions about other things that need to be looked at in phase two.

The Prime Minister has looked at all that and combined it with listening to the arguments made by Grenfell United and others, which are rooted in their strong contention that the process needed to carry the trust of the most important people in it: those people most directly affected by the disaster. She has taken her decision.

I reassure the House that there is no intention of hanging around in identifying the two other panel members that the Prime Minister has agreed to. All Members will recognise that time needs to be given to making sure that we get this absolutely right in bringing to the table the right combination of experience and expertise to fill any perceived gaps, so that those individuals carry the confidence of the community. That is absolutely fundamental to the Prime Minister and my undertaking is to continue working with the community. I am sure that Sir Martin understands that completely as well. The intention is to get on with identifying and appointing the panel members in consultation with Sir Martin as soon as possible.

The petition also considers that, to secure trust in the inquiry, legal representatives of the bereaved families and survivors should be able to see all the evidence from the start and be allowed to question witnesses at the hearings. For the information of the House, the inquiry has received some 330,000 documents and has conducted an initial review of more than 180,000. The expectation is that more will follow. The inquiry must review the documents, first of all for relevance and to identify duplication, and then to decide how each document fits into the picture that the inquiry is building up.

The inquiry has been disclosing documentary evidence to core participants on a confidential basis since February and continues to do so in the run-up to the start of the

hearings. It will disclose further relevant information as the hearings progress, and it must be right that the independent public inquiry is allowed to determine how and when it discloses information. As the inquiry moves forward, it will develop its picture and assess the relevance of the documentary evidence as it progresses.

Joanna Cherry: MPs are advised that only a tiny percentage of the relevant documents have been disclosed so far to core participants' lawyers. Given the recent scandals over lack of disclosure by the Crown Prosecution Service in England, can the Minister give the families of the deceased and the survivors sitting here today reassurance that disclosure will happen fully and orderly for this inquiry?

Mr Hurd: I am absolutely sure that that is the intention of those leading the inquiry. The process I have set out is one that is absolutely familiar and typical in relation to public inquiries. When we are talking about hundreds and thousands of documents, some judgments have to be made and some judgments will be challenged. I think there will be transparency in the form of regular bulletins from the inquiry. I would like the hon. and learned Lady and others to build into their feelings some consideration of the need to avoid unacceptable delays in the process of the inquiry. Underlying this is a strong feeling that I know well: people are worried about how long the process will take, and they are right to be, given some of the examples of the past. So these are judgments for the inquiry, but I think there will be transparency around the process and it will be open to challenge.

The third part of the petition is about the right to question witnesses. Core participants are able to suggest lines of questioning that the inquiry should pursue and, with permission from the inquiry, can ask witnesses questions through their own legal representatives. The inquiry rules are clear that the recognised legal representative of a core participant can seek permission to ask questions of a witness giving oral evidence. In his response to the inquiry's procedural hearing in December, Sir Martin said that he would approach with an open mind any such applications, and that is the approach he will take.

Alison McGovern: While the Minister is covering that aspect of the inquiry, will he respond to my point about parity of arms? I know that legal resources are being made available to the families of those we lost at Grenfell, and that is a good thing, but I worry about getting into a situation in which, yet again, the state has vastly more resources at its disposal for lawyers than families do. That inequality cannot be tolerated, I am afraid.

Mr Hurd: I absolutely share the hon. Lady's concern, as will anyone who has read the Bishop's report. I also worked on the response to the death in custody review, in which exactly the same point was made by Dame Elish. There is a fundamental point here on which I hope we will make significant progress in our responses to the Bishop's report and the death in custody review.

I wish to reassure the House about the scale and pace of the inquiry. I should also put on record commendation of the way in which Sir Martin has not only stepped up to the responsibility but driven the process at pace. Many of those who have campaigned for the change have been at pains to point out that it is not a personal criticism of him. There is tremendous respect for his integrity and his forensic ability. He is driving a very

complicated process at pace. He has granted 547 core participants to the inquiry, 519 of whom are individuals from the Grenfell community. That is an unprecedented number.

Procedural hearings to consider matters relating to the conduct of the inquiry have taken place and on 27 April the inquiry published a timetable for its phase one hearings, which will focus on the factual narrative of the events on 14 June 2017. Before the evidential hearings start on 4 June, there will be two weeks of hearings, beginning on 21 May, commemorating all those who lost their lives. That will provide an opportunity for those families who lost loved ones at Grenfell Tower to commemorate them as individuals, calmly and with dignity. The bereaved families will be able to memorialise their loved ones in any way they think best, whether as a presentation, an audio recording, a short film or in any other way. That shows the inquiry's commitment to ensuring that the bereaved, the survivors and the residents are central to its work. The counsel to the inquiry has said that by

“starting the public hearings in this way, we can ensure that, however technical and scientific the issues may become”—

and they will—

“however dry, however legal, we will never lose sight of who our work is for and why we are doing it”,

and he is right on that.

Following the commemorations, the evidential hearings will begin on 4 June. They will hear evidence from the inquiry's expert witnesses and London fire brigade personnel. The hearings will run until the end of July. There will be no hearings in August, as the inquiry prepares to hear evidence from the bereaved, the survivors and local residents, starting on 3 September and running for approximately four weeks. Further expert witness evidence will be heard during October, and the closing statements will be made in the week beginning 29 October. Sir Martin will prepare an interim report following the end of the phase one oral evidence hearings, and the programme for the phase two hearings will be issued nearer the time.

Kevin Hollinrake: Bearing in mind the lack of confidence in the local authority, where reasonable concerns exist in the community, whether about the local authority, the inquiry or rehousing, is the Minister confident that clear processes and channels are in place for those concerns to be raised directly with the Minister and acted upon?

Mr Hurd: Since the start of the process, Ministers have been sitting down with representatives of Kensington and Chelsea and all the other state agencies that are working together on Grenfell to challenge things we have been told and to ask ourselves how we can support the statutory agencies in their work, so I can give my hon. Friend that assurance.

I wish to make reference to the fact that the public inquiry is, of course, not the only route to truth and justice. Only one Member of Parliament has mentioned the other route this afternoon, which is the criminal investigation. Let us be clear, the Metropolitan Police Service has started one of the largest criminal investigations ever outside counter-terrorism, with a dedicated team of approximately 200 officers, many of whom I met on a recent visit to Hendon. The team are extremely professional and very, very dedicated to doing the job

[Mr Hurd]

properly. They are fully engaged with the public inquiry and are focused on four key areas. To give an idea of the scale and complexity of what they are dealing with, approximately 460 companies have been identified as having some involvement in work on Grenfell Tower, and the current estimate is that about 35 million documents will have to be processed. Let us not lose sight of the criminal investigation, because it is also a critical path to justice.

In conclusion, I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) that there is no walking away from Grenfell. That would be a complete abdication of our responsibility to our fellow citizens who have suffered a terrible wrong. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley said, we know in this place just how badly the state has failed in the past in such situations, and we cannot fall into that trap again. Parliament will hold the Government of the day fully to account on that fundamental truth. Justice is a precondition of the healing we want to see. The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) said that trust was a precondition of justice; in fact, it is the passage of facts and truths that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley talked about, combined with the forensic investigation that my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) referred to, that are the preconditions. However, we cannot proceed without trust.

We cannot proceed without the buy-in of those who are the most important in the process, those most directly affected, those whose lives have been ripped apart

by this disaster. They need to trust the process. That is at the heart of and underpins the Prime Minister's decision, which is a big one. To change the course of a public inquiry is a big decision that is not taken lightly, and she has done so because she recognises the fundamental truth of the debate, which is to put the needs and feelings of those most affected by the disaster at the heart not just of the public inquiry, but of all our thoughts and all our processes, to try to help on this journey towards healing, recovery and a rebuilding of lives and hope. So no, we are not going away on Grenfell. We must deliver truth, justice and accountability.

7.29 pm

Paul Scully: I pay tribute once again to the campaigners, and I want to explain to them and the people watching that if they have seen MPs drifting in and out, it is because of the nature of this House and of our different priorities at any given time. I hope they will have seen that the interest in the debate—we have had four Cabinet Ministers coming in and out—shows the importance that we place upon solving the situation and bringing justice to the people who are most affected. Of all the speeches, the last one, by the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), really had the balance right between the raw passion that is still there, for her from Lakanal, and her approach to solving the problem. That is what we must do. We need action.

7.30 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Written Statements

Monday 14 May 2018

DEFENCE

Astute Boat 7

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):

I am pleased to announce today that we have reached a major milestone with the investment of £1.5 billion for the whole boat contract with BAE Systems to build the seventh boat in our Astute class submarine fleet. I also have the privilege to announce that this submarine will be named AGINCOURT.

AGINCOURT is the final boat of the Astute class, underpinning the commitment made by this Government in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review. AGINCOURT is expected to come into service with the Royal Navy in the mid-2020s to undertake a wide range of tasks in support of military operations worldwide.

[HCWS680]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

BBC World Service

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): The BBC Chairman and I have agreed the “Objectives, Priorities and Targets” (OPTs) for the BBC World Service Licence. The OPTs have been set for a five-year period 2017 to 2022. The licence can be found on the BBC website:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/managementstructure/bbcstructure>.

The BBC World Service is the world’s largest international broadcaster, broadcasting news, documentaries and discussions in 42 languages. The World Service continues to provide insight and fresh perspective across the major global stories of the year. The total weekly reach of the World Service in 2016-17 was a record 346 million (up from 320 million in 2015-16) and the BBC remains on track to achieve its ambition to reach a global audience of 500 million by 2022.

While many broadcasters are increasingly partisan, people around the world have confidence in the accuracy and impartiality of the BBC’s journalism. The BBC World Service is one of the most influential and trusted of British institutions and it is instrumental in helping to promote Britain and our values around the world. The FCO will continue to support them to enhance the lives of millions of people, making high-quality independent news and analysis accessible in markets of need.

The objectives for the World Service contribute to the fulfilment of the mission and the promotion of the BBC’s public purposes, including providing high-quality news coverage; current affairs; and factual programming to international audiences, which is firmly based on British values of accuracy, impartiality, and fairness. The objectives focus on four key areas:

maximising the reach of all language services;

protecting the BBC World Service’s position as the most trusted provider of accurate and independent international news;

delivering essential news and content that allows audiences to engage in democratic processes as informed citizens, and reflects the values and culture of the United Kingdom to the world; and

demonstrating value for money and transparency, seeking alternative sources of funding where appropriate.

The BBC will report annually against the objectives, priorities and targets I have agreed with the BBC Board. This will include assessment of progress against quantitative targets.

I will meet the BBC Chair (or their nominated representatives) annually to discuss the services, review the performance report, and consider any adjustments that need to be made, including targets. If the BBC Chair and I agree, we may also consider adjustments to services outside this timing, in response to significant changes in market conditions or world events.

[HCWS681]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Legacy of Northern Ireland’s Past

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): As Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my objective is to build a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Northern Ireland, that is fit for the future.

As part of this, we need to address the legacy of Northern Ireland’s troubled past, which continues to cast a large shadow on the present.

There is broad agreement that the current processes for addressing the past are not working well for anyone.

In 2014, the UK Government, along with the main Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government reached the Stormont House agreement, which contained the most far-reaching proposals yet for addressing the past.

The Government believe that the proposed new legacy bodies in the agreement have the potential to provide better outcomes for victims and survivors and ensure there is no unfair and disproportionate focus on former members of the armed forces and police officers. The new bodies will be under clear statutory obligations to operate in ways which are fair, balance and proportionate.

Having discussed these proposals extensively with political parties in Northern Ireland, we believe that the time is now to allow for a wider public consultation, as we committed to in our 2017 Northern Ireland manifesto.

Now is the time for everyone with an interest in addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland’s past to have their say.

This consultation will run until 10 September and be published on the Government’s website at: <http://www.gov.uk/nio>.

I have placed a copy of the consultation document in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS682]

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