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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 19 June 2018

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Secretary of State was asked—

NHS Workforce

1. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What steps he has taken to tackle NHS workforce shortages. [905912]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): NHS England, NHS Improvement and Health Education England are working with trusts on a range of recruitment, retention and return-to-practice programmes to ensure that the required workforce are in place to deliver safe and effective services.

Martyn Day: The nursing vacancy rate in England is more than double that in Scotland, with one in 10 positions unfilled. The Royal College of Nursing has welcomed the Scottish Government's Health And Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill, which will enshrine safe staffing levels in law. Will the Minister now follow the Scottish Government's example and bring such a provision into law for NHS England?

Stephen Barclay: I fear that the hon. Gentleman wrote his question before yesterday's announcement. I thought that he might have started by welcoming the additional £2 billion of investment that Scotland's NHS will be receiving. We are making historic investment in recruitment, which is why we are opening five new medical schools in England, training 1,500 new medical doctors, taking initiatives such as on apprenticeships and opening new pathways into clinical roles.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): While I welcome yesterday's announcement and the workforce strategy that is coming out in the autumn, will the Minister comment on the Home Office's new proposals to allow greater flexibility for professional clinicians coming to work in the UK, and on what impact that might have on filling vacancies?

Stephen Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention both to the Home Office's welcome announcement on tier 2 visas and to the work on the workforce strategy, in which he played a key role. It will ensure that we have the right workforce for the NHS for the next 10 years.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): But the Royal College of Nursing and the Nursing and Midwifery Council are both now so worried about Brexit's impact on the staffing crisis that they have called for a people's vote on a deal. Given their on-the-ground experience and the demolition of the myth of a Brexit dividend for the NHS, is it not becoming ever more clear that the dogmatic hard Brexit being pursued by the Government is already doing untold damage to our NHS?

Stephen Barclay: The right hon. Gentleman, as a former Minister of State, will not want to choose selectively from the data on European economic area recruitment into the NHS. He will know full well that there are 3,200 more NHS staff from the EU since the referendum, which shows that people are still coming. If he has an issue with the Brexit dividend, perhaps, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out yesterday, he will raise that with his party leader, who sees that there is a Brexit dividend.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Kettering General is a wonderful hospital with amazing staff, but one of its big financial problems is caused by its over-reliance on agency staff. What can be done to reduce the reliance of so many hospitals, including Kettering, on agency staff to populate their wards?

Stephen Barclay: My hon. Friend rightly points to the key issue of how we bring down the £2.5 billion of agency spend. That goes to the heart of the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday. Up-front investment in our workforce will allow us to reduce that agency cost.

21. [905933] **Mike Hill** (Hartlepool) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that the recent High Court decision on universal credit, which determined that one of my constituents with severe mental health issues was discriminated against financially for moving from one area to another, was correct? Does he agree that people with disabilities should not be penalised in such a way? Will he commit to increasing mental health budgets to ensure that such people get the support that they need in their communities post-Winterbourne?

Mr Speaker: Order. The question should relate to the workforce, which is the matter we are dealing with now, but never mind. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is interested in hearing about the workforce situation.

Stephen Barclay: The two do go together because the mental health workforce is a key component of the NHS workforce. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the extra £1 billion by 2020 that the Prime Minister announced yesterday, as well as the Government's prioritisation of mental health, which for too long has been seen as a Cinderella service within the NHS.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): In 2015, the Secretary of State suggested that junior doctor rotas contributed to avoidable hospital deaths, but research shows that the most important factor is the number of patients under the care of each registered nurse. A 7% increase in mortality for every patient means that 36,000 nursing vacancies in England pose a real threat to patient safety. So with no announcement, and a

33% drop in applications since the removal of the nursing bursary, will the Government follow the Scottish Government's policy and reintroduce the bursary?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Lady will be well aware that there are 14,000 more nurses in the NHS than five years ago, but she is right to point to the wider issue of long-term workforce planning. That is why she will be aware that Audit Scotland criticised NHS Scotland for its lack of long-term workforce planning.

Dr Whitford *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady's second question will be a lot shorter, I am sure.

Dr Whitford: As the Minister heard, the Scottish Government have just passed a law on staffing. With an ageing population, social care is critical to the function of the NHS, but the charity Independent Age says that we will be short of 700,000 care workers by 2037. With no extra funding for social care announced yesterday, how will the Secretary of State make caring a real profession? Would not it be good to start with a decent wage?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Lady's supplementary question really reinforces the answer that I gave a moment ago: the essence of why we need a long-term plan is so that we anticipate these issues. We are addressing that through the Green Paper on social care, and that is part of the investment that the Prime Minister announced yesterday.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): Yesterday the Prime Minister said that "current workloads are not sustainable"—

is that any wonder after eight years of Tory cuts and austerity? The Minister knows that the number of health visitors in the workforce is falling, and that health visitors are vital to improving child health and wellbeing outcomes. No new public health money was announced yesterday; new money will come in 2020. Can the Minister guarantee that health visitor numbers will not continue to fall and that the public health budget will be ring-fenced?

Stephen Barclay: I am grateful that the shadow Secretary of State has drawn attention to public health because the Government have been making significant progress in that area. We have the lowest ever number of teenagers smoking and the lowest ever teenage pregnancy rate. Binge drinking is down and we are addressing child obesity with the sugar tax, which is among a number of measures that the Government have been bringing forward. We are making progress on public health and the hon. Gentleman is right to draw that to the attention of the House.

Jonathan Ashworth: This Government are breaking the Tory manifesto promise and raising taxes, yet they cannot even answer basic questions about health visitor numbers. The NHS workforce deliver the constitutional performance targets, including the 18-week referral-to-treatment target, and targets for accident and emergency and cancer treatment. Will the Minister reassure patients and the taxpayers whose taxes are going up that he will rule out dropping those essential targets?

Stephen Barclay: Once again—as we heard yesterday—there is no welcome for the announcement of additional funding for the NHS. Opposition Front Benchers are playing politics and talking down our NHS. The Prime Minister has set out a long-term vision to improve standards and raise mental health, which Labour Back Benchers highlighted. The hon. Gentleman should come to the House and welcome that investment in our NHS.

Regional Health Inequalities

2. **Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the level of funding for the NHS on regional health inequalities. [905913]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): We take a comprehensive approach to reducing health inequalities, underpinned by legal duties. This includes addressing the wider causes of ill health, promoting healthier lifestyles, and tackling differences in health access and outcomes. A formula is used to allocate funding to clinical commissioning groups, and health inequalities form part of this.

Liam Byrne: Birmingham has some of the worst health outcomes in the country. It is not a surprise, as A&E waits of over four hours are up by more than 127% in recent years, and waits of more than 18 weeks for treatment are up by 65%. Yet, according to freedom of information request responses I have received, our trusts in Birmingham have to make savings of £155 million this year. What are the Government going to do to save the health system in Birmingham, which is currently in a state of collapse?

Jackie Doyle-Price: It is disappointing to hear the right hon. Gentleman making such negative points about his local NHS when 86% of GPs in his area are rated good or outstanding. Everything about yesterday's announcement will tell Members that we are not complacent about the health challenges facing us, and we will make the necessary resources available. It ill behoves Opposition Members to keep continually talking down our NHS.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the best way in which to reduce health inequalities across the country is to continue to build a strong economy that offers good jobs and prospects to all the people of our country?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I could not have put that better myself—[*Laughter.*] Opposition Members can laugh, but the Government firmly believe that work is good for people's health. We are committed to getting 1 million more people with disabilities into work so that we actually treat them as assets, and we are encouraging them to be more independent and to take control of their own lives. The only way to achieve that is by having a strong economy.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): When the coalition Government came into office in 2010, life expectancy began to stall for the first time in over a century. This, coupled with eight years of funding cuts, means that there are grossly disproportionate

health inequalities across the country. For example, according to Northern Health Science Alliance, people in the north are 20% more likely to die early than people in the south. Is not it a failure of the Government's funding deal for the NHS that it comes with no public health money to tackle these astonishing regional health inequalities?

Jackie Doyle-Price: No, it is not. Labour Members like to draw attention to north-south divides and so on, but the issues about health inequalities are much more complex than how money is spent and where. Within my constituency, for example, there are differences of 10 years in life expectancy depending on the particular locality. We need a much more multi-layered approach to tackling inequality, and that is what this Government will have.

Tier 2 Visa Cap

3. **Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): What discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the effect of the tier 2 visa cap on recruitment in the NHS and social care sector. [905914]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Last week the Home Secretary removed doctors and nurses from the tier 2 visa cap.

Layla Moran: In Oxfordshire, the situation with social care workers is at least as bad a problem. Of course we all very much welcome the removal of doctors and nurses from the cap, but what about social care workers? Why are we focusing on only half the problem?

Mr Hunt: Perhaps I can help the hon. Lady by pointing out that tier 2 visa cap is specifically for higher-paid workers. We do need to think about social care workers, but a lot of them are lower paid. That is why we are putting together a 10-year workforce plan for the health and social care sectors, both of which are very important. We will make sure that that goes hand in glove with the NHS plan that we announced yesterday.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The real effect of the cap is that there are not enough staff in the health service, as is shown by "NHS SOS", a campaign run a few weeks ago in Stoke by *The Sentinel* that highlighted the lack of doctors and nurses. Realistically, what will the Secretary of State do to remedy that situation in Stoke-on-Trent? Will he meet people from *The Sentinel* so that they can present the evidence?

Mr Hunt: Let me tell the hon. Gentleman what we have been doing in the past five years: we have 14,300 more nurses, 10,100 more doctors, and over 40,000 more clinicians across different specialties. He will be very relieved to know that, on top of that, we are promising 50% more than his party did at the last election.

People with Learning Disabilities

4. **Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the (a) quality and (b) availability of health and social care services for people with learning disabilities. [905915]

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): Commissioning high-quality health and social care services is a local responsibility. The Care Quality Commission monitors, inspects and regulates services that people with a learning disability may use. Where quality and safety standards are not met, it will take action.

Kate Hollern: The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services warned this week that social care services are on the verge of collapse. Despite the announcement of £20 billion yesterday, there was no mention of social care. Cuts of more than £7 billion have left hundreds of thousands of elderly and disabled people without adequate support. What specific measures are the Government taking to ensure that the elderly and disabled are receiving proper care?

Caroline Dinenage: Adult social care was mentioned yesterday, specifically in the news that we plan to bring together the way in which health and social care interoperate. We need more collaborative work between health and social care to reduce the amount of pressure that one puts upon the other. We have set out very clearly that we will produce a Green Paper later this year to address how we will tackle the challenges that we face in adult social care, and we will look at how we fund that.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): Providers of day care services for people with learning disabilities are not currently subject to an inspection regime. Will the Minister consider bringing such services within the scope of the Care Quality Commission to reassure families about quality and safeguarding issues?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the fundamental importance of being reassured that all services that are provided are safe and reliable. Since the CQC has been looking at services up and down the country, it has brought to them a level of transparency and, indeed, quality. We keep under review the services that it regulates, and this is certainly something that we can discuss with it.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Will the Government end uncertainty for people with learning difficulties who need social care by funding the historical liabilities associated with the sleep-ins crisis?

Caroline Dinenage: We are aware of concerns in the sector with regard to sleep-ins and we are looking very carefully at the options. We have been developing the evidence base very carefully. We have been engaging with the European Commission, the sector and other Government Departments.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust recently won a bid under the Beyond Places of Safety scheme to put in place IT support for users of learning disability services. Is that not a very useful way of taking forward such projects?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is vital that when we look at how to move forward with both our health and social care services, we are able to capture all the latest technology to ensure that we improve the experience for all our service users.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Much of the health and social care for people with learning disabilities in Plymouth is provided by Livewell Southwest, a social enterprise. The new pay increases for NHS staff will not be mapped over to social enterprise staff, so when they merge back into the NHS, we risk a two-tier workforce. Will the Minister consider extending the pay increases to support those who work with people with learning difficulties in the social enterprise sector so that we ensure that everyone doing the same job is paid the same amount?

Caroline Dinenge: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. It would be terrible to see a health and social care sector in which people doing the same work are valued differently, so I will look carefully at the point he raises.

Life Sciences and Medical Research

5. **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support UK life sciences and medical research. [905916]

22. **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support UK life sciences and medical research. [905934]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): The life sciences sector is critical to the UK economy, which is why we support it with a £1 billion annual grant through the National Institute for Health Research.

Luke Graham: What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to further life sciences in Scotland? Will he meet me to see what the UK Government can do to support the forthcoming International Environment Centre in Clackmannanshire in my constituency?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that. The life sciences industry is critical to Scotland, and Scotland's role is critical to the UK. We all remember Dolly the sheep being pioneered in Edinburgh University, and last week's announcement of a new centre in Renfrewshire is another good example of the great things happening in Scotland.

Alan Mak: The use of big data and artificial intelligence in medical research has the potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives. Will my right hon. Friend consider setting up data hubs and support the full digitisation of patient records?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is very knowledgeable about that area. We have announced the creation of a set of digital innovation hubs, and perhaps we can broaden those to turn them into the hubs that he thinks would be a good idea.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Getting new drugs approved more quickly would not just be a big boost for the life sciences and medical research sectors, but would help my constituents and others across the country with cystic fibrosis who desperately need access to Orkambi. They have been waiting for years; it is not good enough. Why can the Secretary of State not sort this out, get a

grip, get his officials and Vertex in a room, and force them to come to an agreement? People have waited too long for this.

Mr Hunt: That is exactly what we have been doing, but we need Vertex to be reasonable regarding the price that it offers the NHS. We need to pay fair prices. We have heard that it will be coming back with a new offer next week—we hope it is a reasonable one—but we urge Vertex to waive commercial confidentiality so that we can all see, in the interests of transparency, the kind of prices it is trying to charge the NHS.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State consider West Yorkshire in particular? We have the universities, the science, the technology and the life sciences; all we need is a new teaching hospital in Huddersfield.

Mr Hunt: We have great teaching hospitals in Yorkshire and we have introduced five new medical schools. When we do the new workforce plan later this year, who knows? We may need more.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), we know that the UK is a world leader in research into rare conditions, but that does not always translate into timely access to those treatments. The Secretary of State will know that there are many CFTR—cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator—treatments in the pipeline that could benefit people who are living with cystic fibrosis. Will he meet me to see how we can ensure that those are available in a timely manner for the people who desperately need them?

Mr Hunt: Of course I am happy to meet my hon. Friend. I recognise that this is one of the things that we are not good at at the moment. We have fantastic research, with amazing new drugs developed in this country, but our uptake can be painfully slow, and that is of course something that we want to put right.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): ME affects approximately a quarter of a million people across the UK, and while there has been substantial psychological research into the condition, there has been very little biomedical research. What funding will the Secretary of State make available specifically for biomedical research into the treatment and diagnosis of ME?

Mr Hunt: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that issue. She is introducing a debate on it in Westminster Hall on Thursday. I have met a number of families who have suffered very badly as a result of ME, and we would all like better research, so I hope that her campaign is successful.

Sport: Public Health

6. **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the public health benefits of participation in sport. [905917]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): There is a strong body of evidence on the health benefits of participating in sport—

possibly not watching it, if last night is anything to go by. Last year, a review by Sport England brought together evidence to show the association between sport and physical and mental wellbeing.

Craig Tracey: As the Minister may be aware, I co-chair the all-party parliamentary group for golf—a sport sometimes labelled, rather unfairly, a good walk spoiled. Does he agree that there are many positive health benefits associated with participation in golf, especially for people with long-term conditions?

Steve Brine: I certainly would, as someone who used to work in the golf industry before coming to the House. I was at Wentworth last month for the PGA, and a good example of what my hon. Friend refers to is a social enterprise that I met called Golf in Society led by an inspirational chap called Anthony Blackburn. He founded a project at Lincoln Golf Centre that works with people with dementia and Parkinson's disease to show that golf is one of the best leisure activities out there, and gives people with those long-term conditions a sense that their life is not over and that they can still play golf, and play it rather well—probably better than me.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): In 2016, Stoke-on-Trent was the European city of sport, but it faces some of the highest health inequalities in the country. The Stoke newspaper *The Sentinel* highlighted the power of exercise in its recent NHS SOS campaign. Will the Minister meet the editor Martin Tideswell and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) to receive details of that incredibly important local campaign?

Steve Brine: I am aware of that campaign. Something that we want to see in schools across the country, including in Stoke, is the Golden Mile. I see good examples in schools in my constituency and across the country when I travel. We are interested to learn more about what Stoke has done on this subject.

Homelessness

7. **Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to ensure that homeless people are able to access healthcare and dentistry services. [905919]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): NHS England has a legal duty to commission services to meet local need, which includes people who are homeless, and we are very clear that a patient should not be turned away from a GP if they cannot produce any supporting documentation. If they state that they reside within the boundaries for the practice, the GP is expected to accept the registration. The same applies for dentistry, and training is in place to remind people of their obligations.

Stella Creasy: Mags Drummond is a Walthamstow woman on a mission, to try to help our many rough sleepers get decent quality healthcare, but she, like me, has hit a brick wall with our local dentists and doctors. It is little wonder that one study shows that 15% of homeless people have pulled out their own teeth because

they cannot get access to services. Will the Minister meet Mags and me to look at what we can do to change that and make sure that her promises are not toothless?

Jackie Doyle-Price: Very good—I commend the hon. Lady for her wit, and I agree with her. Notwithstanding our expectations of GPs and dentists in this regard, it is quite clear that homeless people do not always have access to the treatment they should have. The hon. Lady will be aware of the work that we are doing to support rough sleepers, and I would be delighted to meet her and Mags Drummond to see what insight they can provide on how we can improve services in this area.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. It is of the utmost importance that we are ready for the one-minute silence, so I shall take a brief inquiry from Mr Nic Dakin, and a brief reply.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): There are homeless people in the Scunthorpe area who present with mental health problems. What are the Government doing to ensure that proper mental health support is there for people who present as homeless?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Mental health is both a symptom and a cause of homelessness, and we will tackle that as part of our work on rough sleepers.

Mr Speaker: Does anyone else want to come in on this? Apparently not. I do not wish to proceed to the next question because of the unpredictability of the time that it will take. Colleagues will want to prepare themselves for the one-minute silence that we are about to observe. I think I can say with some confidence that everyone who is in the House today will wish to observe that one-minute silence. Perhaps they will think it appropriate to stand. That one-minute silence is going to start very soon. The next question is grouped, so it would be highly inconvenient to take it. Any moment now we shall observe the silence. [*Interruption.*] There is much merit in repetition in certain circumstances.

Order. We shall now observe silence for one minute to remember those who died or were affected by the attack outside Finsbury Park mosque, I remind colleagues, a year ago today.

12 noon

The House observed a minute's silence.

Personal Health and Care Budgets

8. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage the adoption of personal health and care budgets. [905920]

18. **Andrew Lewer** (Northampton South) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage the adoption of personal health and care budgets. [905930]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I know that the thoughts of the whole House are with the families affected by the terrible atrocity a year ago.

Personal health budgets have a transformative effect on people with very complex health needs, and we plan for 50,000 to 100,000 more people to benefit from them by 2021.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. Does he agree that a key part of integrating health and social care is giving individuals more say and flexibility in how they use their entitlements? Will he consider extending his pilots to my constituency of North West Norfolk?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely, and not just to North West Norfolk, but to the whole country. We are currently consulting on giving a right to personal health budgets to people with the most complex health needs. That would be about 350,000 people and would include anyone with a continuing NHS need combined with a mental health need, a learning disability, autism or PTSD. Obviously, it would be hugely significant if we were able to proceed with that.

Andrew Lewer: Will the Minister ensure that the long-term NHS plan puts a major emphasis on empowering patients through the wider availability of personal budgets? May I also join my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham) and make a pitch for my local area of Northampton for one of the next wave of pilots?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely, and technology will have a big role, because this year we intend all NHS patients to be able to access their health records through an app. That will be extremely empowering, but my hon. Friend is right that giving people with long-term conditions control over their health and care destiny is a potentially huge leap forward.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): While I agree with the philosophy and approach behind health and personal care budgets, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the 21% fall in social care funding between 2010 and 2015-16 has caused a catastrophe in this area? Will he acknowledge that if this approach is to work in future, the funding has to be there?

Mr Hunt: I congratulate the last Labour Government on introducing direct payments, which were the first step in this process. The hon. Lady talks about cuts in social care, which I acknowledge, but, with respect to her, she never talks about the reason, which was that in 2008 we had the worst financial crisis in our peacetime history, and we had to take measures. It is as a result of creating 3.2 million jobs since then that funding for social care is now going up.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Bearing in mind that the number of bed days lost increased in the second quarter of 2017-18, with most of the patients subject to delays being elderly people, will the Minister outline a dedicated strategy for getting people out of hospital and back home with appropriate care as a matter of urgency, for the good of the patient as well as the public purse?

Mr Hunt: This is a huge challenge in all parts of the United Kingdom. In England, about 22% of bed days are occupied by people who have been in hospital for

more than three weeks, and probably less than 20% of those people should be in hospital. We are taking urgent steps to rectify that, because it is very, very bad for the patients involved.

Mental Health Workforce

9. **Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con):** What steps he is taking to increase the size of the mental health workforce. [905921]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): The mental health workforce plan published last summer underpins our expansion of mental health services, as set out in the “Five Year Forward View for Mental Health”. We aim to create 21,000 new posts in mental health by 2021.

Mr Jones: I thank the Minister for her response. Mental health is one of the many complex drivers of rough sleeping, and can add to the complexity of getting rough sleepers off the street and into accommodation. Will my hon. Friend say how the new mental health employees in the NHS can help us to get rough sleepers off the streets and into accommodation?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I hope the expansion of mental health services will stop people becoming rough sleepers in the first place by bringing forward support earlier in the process. In January, we announced a £1 billion investment in mental health, part of which will be focused on crisis care and helping people who are experiencing crisis to stay out of hospital. The workforce plan backs that commitment by planning 5,200 posts to support those in crisis. We will be working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on a forthcoming strategy to make sure we honour our commitments.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is not just the size of the mental health workforce that is critical, but the pressures faced within those workforces. We have just learned that there was the highest number of out-of-area placements in January since records were first kept. Mental health doctors and nurses often spend hours hunting for out-of-area beds, taking them away from other patients. When is the Government’s pledge to reduce and eventually ban out-of-area placements actually going to start to become a reality?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Lady is right to raise this issue. We are determined to end out-of-area placements, but clearly that will require behavioural change on the part of commissioners, as well as making sure that the investment takes place. I know she will continue to hold me to account on this issue, because it is clear that out-of-area placements can cause harm and we must tackle them.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): According to data from 48 of 56 NHS mental health trusts, 3,652 patients suffered an injury in 2016-17 through being restrained—the highest number ever. There are concerns that increased use of insufficiently trained agency and bank staff since 2013 is contributing to this increase. Employing 21,000 new staff by 2021 just is not good enough. What is the Minister doing now to ensure that wards are safely staffed and patients are not injured?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. She will be aware that I have been working with her colleague the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) on his Bill to limit the use of restraint, because we on the Government Benches also very firmly believe in that. An essential part of his measure will be to improve training for staff in mental health units. That will be a tool in making sure that restraint is minimised.

Capital Investment Projects

10. **Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): What funding his Department has recently allocated to capital investment projects in the NHS. [905922]

23. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What funding his Department has recently allocated to capital investment projects in the NHS. [905935]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): In the Budget we announced £3.9 billion of additional capital funding, and 77 projects have conditional approval.

Sir Roger Gale: Could my right hon. Friend indicate what implications that welcome statement might have for the much needed rebuilding and refurbishment of the A&E unit at the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital in Margate?

Mr Hunt: I hope it will have a positive impact. We are asking NHS trusts to get their proposals in during July. We are also delighted that there is a new medical school in Canterbury and we hope that this will be the start of a transformation of NHS services.

Kevin Foster: Earlier this year, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust was allocated £13.3 million of capital funding for improved urgent care and a new emergency department at Torbay Hospital. Will my right hon. Friend confirm what progress is being made to get those major construction projects under way?

Mr Hunt: I think it will be brilliant not just for patients at Torbay Hospital but for patients living in Newton Abbot and Torquay. My understanding is that this project is on track, and my hon. Friend should be very proud, because he campaigned hard.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Warrington desperately needs a new hospital to replace its old, out-of-date buildings, so in allocating future capital funding will the Secretary of State bear in mind the levels of health deprivation that exist in the area, and will he ensure that any new hospital is accessible to those in my constituency, which has areas that are among the most health deprived in the borough?

Mr Hunt: I visited the hospital not too long ago and was able to see for myself some of the estate issues the hon. Lady talks about. I can assure her that need is a fundamental criterion when we look at allocating capital funding.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that he has presided over a crisis in capital funding, with a £5.5 billion estimated

maintenance backlog, £1 billion of which is classified as urgent. Yesterday's statement hopefully goes some way to addressing that, although it was far from clear whether capital funding was included in that announcement. Can the Secretary of State confirm today whether any cash generated by the sale of NHS property under the Naylor review is in addition to the money announced yesterday?

Mr Hunt: Yes, I can.

Highly Specialised Technologies Evaluations

11. **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): What recent discussions his Department has had with representatives of NICE on increasing the capacity of the highly specialised technologies evaluation process. [905923]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): My officials have regular discussions with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, of course, but we are clear that there is no fixed capacity in NICE's HST programme. The number of drugs that it evaluates each year is driven by the pipeline of drugs expected to come to market, and we will refer any suitable drugs to it for evaluation.

Mary Glendon: There is a risk that new treatments for life-limiting conditions, such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy and spinal muscular atrophy, might not be approved by NICE, so will the Minister meet me and Muscular Dystrophy UK to discuss ways to facilitate access to treatments, as highlighted by the charity's FastTrack campaign?

Steve Brine: NICE has recommended the drug Translarna for use in the treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy; it is now routinely available on the NHS. It is a disease that I grew up with—the friends that I grew up with did not, and I did, and this is a timely reminder of how terrible this disease can be. I would be really pleased, therefore, to meet the hon. Lady and the charity that she mentioned.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): Is the Minister aware of the recent NICE draft review regarding treatment of abdominal aortic aneurysms? Some 1,500 to 2,000 lives are saved yearly by NHS AAA screening. If the draft recommendations are adopted, a patient is likely to have an aneurysm erupt before treatment and 80% of patients are then likely to die. Will the Minister look carefully at this issue to avoid this unintended consequence?

Steve Brine: I am not the all-seeing eye, so all I can say is yes, I will look very carefully at the issue that my hon. Friend raises.

Community First Responders

12. **Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to support community first responder units. [905924]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): Community first responders play a valuable role in helping ambulance services. Support includes ongoing training, necessary medical equipment and occupational health support.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): In just five years, the Neilston and Uplawmoor first responders have responded to over 1,300 calls, saving many lives, and earlier this month they received the Queen's award for voluntary service. Will the Minister join me in congratulating all the volunteers and paying tribute to community first responder units right across the United Kingdom?

Stephen Barclay: I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Stuart McLellan, Ross Nelson and the volunteers that play such a key role. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) also performs this service in his constituency. I have spoken to him about it and I know that it plays a very valuable role.

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, in the frame, we now have a dame—I call Dame Cheryl Gillan.

Epilepsy Guidance (Autism)

14. **Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of including autism in NICE guidance on epilepsy. [905926]

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenge): NICE is currently in the early stages of updating the clinical guidelines on the diagnosis and management of epilepsies in adults, and plan to go out to consultation on a draft scope in October this year.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: The UK's autism research charity Autistica advises that up to 40% of people with epilepsies are, in fact, autistic, and that epileptic seizures are the leading cause of early death for autistic people with a learning disability. NICE guidance has never mentioned autism when referring to epilepsy, and autistic people have distinctive types of epilepsies that require different clinical approaches. Will the Minister please ensure that NICE includes autism in the guidelines on epilepsy?

Caroline Dinenge: At this stage, it is too early in the update process for NICE to say exactly what its guidance will cover. However, my right hon. Friend is chair of the all-party group on autism and vice-chair of the all-party group on epilepsy, and she was the driving force behind the Autism Act 2009. I think that NICE would do very well to heed her advice.

Mr Speaker: And that advice will be proffered on a very large number of occasions in this Chamber until the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) gets what she seeks—I think I can say that with not just confidence, but certainty.

Clinical Staff Shortages

15. **Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support NHS foundation trusts to tackle shortages in clinical staff. [905927]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): The workforce strategy we are bringing forward will include investment and an expansion in the number of medical schools—five new medical schools—alongside those 1,500 new doctor places.

Heidi Allen: I had wanted to ask the Secretary of State to get behind exempting nurses and doctors from the tier 2 visa process, but I do not need to do that; I just have to thank him for his support in doing that. Instead, for his next challenge, will he commit to looking again at the pensions cap, which I fear might be one reason some senior NHS professionals and doctors are retiring sooner than they might otherwise do?

Stephen Barclay: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support on tier 2 visas. She will be aware that clinicians who reach the £1 million lifetime allowance limit can expect a pension of about £44,000, payable at age 60, increasing with inflation, plus a tax-free lump sum of about £132,000. Although these are ultimately issues for the Treasury, it is important that we ensure that tax allowances, two thirds of which go to higher-rate taxpayers, are fair to other taxpayers.

Innovative Drugs and Devices

16. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the use of innovative drugs and devices in the NHS. [905928]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): The Government are committed to ensuring that innovative healthcare products reach patients faster than ever before. We have established the Accelerated Access Collaborative to identify transformative innovations and help their route to market, and today we have appointed Lord Darzi as the new chair of the AAC to lead this work.

Nigel Mills: I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister in her speech yesterday announced much more funding for personalised medicines and new technologies that will transform care. On that basis, will the Minister update the House on when the groundbreaking CAR-T—chimeric antigen receptor T-cell—therapy might be made available to NHS patients suffering from cancer?

Steve Brine: Yes, indeed. As the cancer Minister, I consider CAR-T to be one of the most innovative and exciting treatments ever offered on the NHS. NICE is considering the first of the therapies this year and preparations are well under way. We are working closely with NHS England to make these transformative medicines available to cancer patients.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Patients with PKU—phenylketonuria—are awaiting progress on the approval of a drug called Kuvan. In the meantime, their illness is controlled by diet. Will the Secretary of State and other Members join me in Committee Room 21 after this meeting to hear about the “Diet for a day” challenge, which many Members across the House are taking up next Thursday?

Steve Brine: Having just dialled into the Secretary of State's diary, I know that he is going right after these questions.

Mr Speaker: That is very impressive, up-to-the-minute information from the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Does the Minister have proposals for the reform of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency? I hope so.

Steve Brine: We keep all our arm's length bodies, including the MHRA, under review to provide best value for taxpayers, and we are working closely with Lord O'Shaughnessy, who is the Minister responsible for this area.

Mr Speaker: We have been so brief that we must now include Mr Hollinrake.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Probably the most important recommendation in the new O'Neill review into antimicrobial resistance was the requirement for diagnostics prior to the prescription of antibiotics by 2020. Will the Minister update the House on progress towards that goal, and will he agree to meet me and colleagues, including Lord O'Neill, to discuss the establishment of an antibiotic diagnostics fund?

Steve Brine: Yes, the Government's response to Lord O'Neill's review in 2016 set out new ambitions building on existing progress, including ensuring that tests on epidemiological data are used to support clinical decision making and delivering high-quality diagnostics in the NHS in support of our other ambitions. My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue, and I am happy to meet him.

Childhood Obesity

17. **Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce rates of childhood obesity. [905929]

19. **Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce rates of childhood obesity. [905931]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): We are delivering the most ambitious childhood obesity plan in the world, and we are already seeing results. We always said that our 2016 plan was the start of the conversation, not the final word. [*Interruption.*] Yes, it does say that here, but I have also said it everywhere else many, many times.

Justin Tomlinson: With one in three primary school children leaving either obese or overweight and more than 77% of children not doing the minimum requirement for physical activity, surely the Government's priority should be getting children active by opening up school facilities after hours and in the holidays, not faffing around with political gestures on television advertising that children have long since stopped watching.

Steve Brine: I do not think that it is a binary choice. We recognise that child obesity is caused by many different factors, and that no one policy will work on its own. Yes, this is about tackling advertising, and yes, it is about tackling children's activity and working with schools; and, as I said recently, we will present new proposals very shortly.

Johnny Mercer: As the Minister will know, perhaps the two biggest challenges that we currently face in relation to young people's health are mental health and

child obesity. Will he update the House on the progress of chapter 1 of his childhood obesity plan in reducing the amount of sugar in both food and drink?

Steve Brine: Since we published the plan, progress has been made on sugar reduction. The amount of sugar in soft drinks has been reduced by 11% in response to the industry levy, and Public Health England has published a detailed assessment of progress against delivery of the 5% reduction for the first year. Progress is good, but it is not good enough, which is why we have said that we will produce chapter 2 shortly.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Minister says that progress is not good enough, so why does he not introduce a levy on high-sugar food as well as the one on sugary drinks? Manufacturers would then reformulate the food that they produce.

Steve Brine: Because we believe that there should be a mixture of carrot and stick. We believe that the soft drinks industry levy has been successful, but we are also working with the industry on reformulation across the board. I recently visited Suntory, which makes Lucozade and Ribena. If we work with industry, we see transformative results for companies and for the people who buy their products.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): A few years ago, I initiated a debate on this issue in Westminster Hall. Since then, no progress has been made on childhood obesity. Would the Minister care to outline what he thinks will happen in the lifetime of this Parliament in terms of achieving the objectives that he has set out?

Steve Brine: We assess the plan all the time, and we make progress reports on it, as we did last month with the sugar report. However, when I addressed the Health Committee recently, I could not have made it clearer that we think there has been progress.

This is a world-leading plan. When we talk to other people around the world, they are very keen to hear about what we are doing and very interested, and we are interested in learning from them. If we do not take action, one of our biggest public health challenges will get worse and worse, and that will have implications for the health service and for all our constituents.

Topical Questions

T1. [905937] **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): When something goes tragically wrong in healthcare, the best apology to grieving families is to guarantee that no one will experience the same heartache again. Last week I accepted the recommendations of the Williams review of gross negligence manslaughter, and we announced a new national clinical improvement programme to provide NHS consultants with confidential data on their clinical outcomes. From next April independent medical examiners will examine every hospital death, and the learning from deaths programme will be extended to primary care.

Rosie Cooper: Will the Secretary of State encourage NHS England to respond to my freedom of information request of 13 March this year regarding Greater Manchester Shared Services and the likely failure of the NHS to correctly enforce guidance on recruiting agency staff in the reappointment of Deborah Hancox after her criminal conviction and two-year prison sentence for defrauding the NHS? How can we employ these people?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady has highlighted what is potentially an extremely serious issue. Obviously the FOI is a matter for NHS England, but let me reassure her that the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Stephen Barclay)—the hospitals Minister—met the chief executive of the NHS Counter Fraud Authority this morning.

T6. [905943] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): A recent report by the King's Fund highlighted the potential for a hypothecated source of funding for health and care, with national insurance as a possible starting point. Does my right hon. Friend agree with the report that hypothecation would increase transparency in regard to what our constituents pay for health and care, and will he encourage the Chancellor to look at the report's implications?

Mr Hunt: I thought that the report made powerful reading, and I know that my hon. Friend was associated with it. Yesterday the Prime Minister was straightforward about the fact that, if we are to preserve our NHS and make it one of the best systems in the world, the burden of taxation will need to increase, and she was willing to listen to the views of colleagues about the most appropriate way in which that should be done.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has reported a £7 billion reduction in adult social care funding since 2010, and Age UK has reported there are now "care deserts" in some parts of the country. There are 1.2 million older people living with unmet care needs, and one in five care services has the poorest quality ratings from the Care Quality Commission.

As well as a long-term funding solution for social care, we need the extra £1 billion this year and £8 billion in the current Parliament that Labour pledged before last year's general election. However, all that the Government offer is a delayed Green Paper. When will the Secretary of State deal with the current crisis in social care?

Mr Hunt: No, that is not correct. Yesterday we made very clear our support for the social care system and our recognition that reform of the NHS must go hand in glove with the social care system, and we said there would be a new financial settlement for the social care system. It is also time that the Labour party took some responsibility for the financial crisis that made all these cuts necessary.

T7. [905944] **Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Prostate cancer survival rates may be at a record high, but it is still among the biggest cancer killers in our country today. What can the Government do to save more lives in this area?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): Survival rates are high, but I am ambitious for more. That is why the Prime Minister recently announced £75 million to support new research into the early diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer. We will recruit 40,000 patients into more than 60 studies over the next five years, and further to this even more exciting is the rapid pathway that I was discussing yesterday with Cally Palmer, our national cancer director, which we are trialling across three hospital sites in west London as part of its local cancer alliance.

T2. [905938] **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Given the challenges the Secretary of State and his Government face in recruiting and retaining health and social care staff, will he follow the example of the Scottish Government, who pay their social care assistants and care assistants the real living wage, meaning they earn £1,100 a year more than their counterparts in England?

Mr Hunt: May I gently remind the hon. Lady that it was this Conservative Government who introduced the national living wage, and we did that on the basis of transforming the economy, championing policies that were by and large opposed every step of the way by the Scottish National party?

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Minister of State visited my hospital trust last month. Is he in a position to support its requests, and will he say whether he is satisfied with the progress it is making to remove itself from special measures?

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): I very much enjoyed visiting the trust with my hon. Friend. As he will be aware from our discussion during that visit a process for capital bids is under way. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out, the date for that is mid-July and I look forward to seeing the bid from my hon. Friend's trust.

T3. [905940] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): NICE guidelines on IVF seem to be largely honoured in the breach, leading to a postcode lottery across the country. Is it acceptable that women in North Lincolnshire who cannot conceive are being refused IVF if their partner has had children in another relationship?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I recently met the hon. Gentleman's party colleague, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), to discuss this matter with the facility. We are very clear: we expect all clinical commissioning groups to honour the NICE guidelines. I am very cross that CCGs tend to view IVF services as low-hanging fruit with which to make cuts. That is totally unacceptable and I will be taking steps to remind them of that.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): My hon. Friend has visited Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow and has acknowledged that it is not fit for purpose. Will he use the excellent £20 billion of extra NHS funding to ensure we get the Harlow hospital health campus we need?

Stephen Barclay: My right hon. Friend is right to champion this, as he did through the recent Adjournment debate, when he set out the case in more detail. We recognise, as we did at the last Health questions and in the Adjournment debate, that there are significant issues with the local hospital, and that is why it is working very actively on its bid for capital funding.

T4. [905941] **Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): Four months ago, a damning report exposed the extent of abuse inflicted on children for decades sent overseas by this Department. It said that compensation must be paid, and urgently, because people have died and others are dying. It took a month for the Prime Minister to work out which Department was responsible, and another month for the Health Minister, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), to tell me she was formulating a response. Has she got a response today, or is she honestly going to stand at that Dispatch Box and tell me and all those survivors that the Prime Minister has spent £64 million of public money on a report that the Minister is now trying to bury?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I reject that accusation; we are far from burying it. The Prime Minister is looking at responding to the interim report. I will repeat what I said to the hon. Lady when she last asked this question. We are quite clear that the child migrant policy was wrong. We have apologised for that policy, and we have established a £7 million family restoration fund. The response from the Government to that report will be laid in due course.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Can the Minister provide an update on the work being undertaken by the policy research unit on obesity to consider the relationship between the many streams of marketing and obesity, and can he tell us whether the unit is looking specifically at childhood obesity?

Steve Brine: The National Institute for Health Research—the policy research unit—is specifically looking at the impact of the marketing of products with a high sugar, fat or salt content on children's food and drink preferences and consumption. The unit has already published a report on children's exposure to television advertising, and it will be publishing further findings from other projects later this year.

T5. [905942] **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that there is no such thing as a Brexit dividend, so the Secretary of State will need to put up taxes to fund our NHS. Will he be transparent and promise NHS workers in Portsmouth, to whom he has only just given a pay rise, that the burden will not fall on hard-working families like them—or is he robbing Peter to pay Boris?

Mr Hunt: Will the hon. Gentleman be transparent, if he disagrees with the Brexit dividend, and challenge his own party leader, who supports it?

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): I am delighted that our NHS will be getting an extra £20 billion. This has long been at the top of my agenda, and the agenda of my constituents. Does my right hon. Friend agree

that, to ensure that that money is always spent on the NHS, we need to consider a hypothecated tax as part of the funding plan?

Mr Hunt: As I say, there are compelling arguments in favour of hypothecated taxes, but there are also strong reasons why we have to be cautious—namely, the fact that tax revenues go up and down, year on year, while the NHS needs stable funding. Important arguments and discussions need to happen between now and the Budget, when the Chancellor will make that decision.

T8. [905945] **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): In the light of the additional funding announced by the Secretary of State yesterday, will he tell me how much additional funding will be provided for palliative care, which I highlighted in my Terminal Illness (Provision of Palliative Care and Support for Carers) Bill?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his private Member's Bill. Palliative care is something that we do well in the UK—thanks, a lot, to the brilliant hospice movement—but we can do a lot better. I know that this will be an important part of the NHS plan.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Stroke is the fourth largest single cause of death in Britain. What action are the Government taking to prevent stroke and to raise awareness? And will the Minister meet me to discuss my GP surgery at Sutherland Lodge?

Steve Brine: Two for the price of one. Up to 70% of strokes are preventable if hypertension, atrial fibrillation, diabetes, cholesterol and other lifestyle factors are detected and managed earlier. The current national stroke strategy came to an end last year, so we are working closely with NHS England and the Stroke Association on a new national plan, which I hope to publish this summer.

T9. [905946] **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): One of the biggest causes of regional health inequalities is the broken social care system, yet yesterday's announcement postponed social care reforms again until the autumn. There is no end in sight for the overstretched and underfunded social care system, and without reforms to care, the extra money for the NHS will be wasted. Will the Minister bring up the timetable for those reforms before the care system collapses?

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): The fundamental issue here is that we need a social care system that works hand in hand with our health services—the two are umbilically linked. The key plank of the new NHS 10-year plan must be the full integration of health and care services. It does not make sense to publish the Green Paper before the NHS plan has even been drafted. We will bring forward a Green Paper, but in the meantime, spending on adult social care has gone up by 8% this year.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Like many others, I welcome the announcement yesterday of the £20 billion investment in the NHS. Will my right hon. Friend join me in seeking assurances that the £2 billion extra for the Scottish Government shall be allocated to spending on the NHS in Scotland?

Mr Hunt: I sincerely hope so, because Scottish NHS patients are currently 30% more likely to wait too long for their elective care.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): What comparison has the Minister made of the cost of preventing children and young people's mental health issues by tackling adverse childhood experience in the first few years of life, rather than letting them develop into much costlier issues for school-age children?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Lady will be aware that there is much work going on in this area. We are clear that we need to tackle these issues in schools, which is in the Green Paper, but more support also needs to be given in the early years. We are looking at how we can do that.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): Northern Devon Healthcare Trust recently announced that it is to share the chairman and chief executive of the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust. Will the Minister meet me to ensure that the new arrangements will help to secure services in North Devon?

Stephen Barclay: I am happy to agree to meet my hon. Friend.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Last November, the Health Secretary committed to ending out-of-area mental health placements by 2020, but the number of people placed more than 100 km from their home rose by 65% over the past year. The earlier response from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), was no answer, so what are the Government actually going to do to turn the situation around?

Mr Hunt: There are record numbers of tier 4 beds, and we are putting record amounts of money into mental health.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Mr Speaker, you will recall recently granting me a Westminster Hall debate on the HPV vaccine for boys. Will the Department update me on progress?

Steve Brine: I remember that debate. The matter was on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's June agenda, and I am awaiting its advice with bated

breath. As I said in the debate, I will turn that advice around as soon as I get it and get a decision. I know a lot of people are waiting on that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we have run out of time. However, the person whom I think has been standing the longest is Rachael Maskell.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. NHS Property Services intends to sell the Bootham Park Hospital site, but reinvesting in that site would make such a difference to the health needs of our city. Will the Minister ensure that that happens?

Stephen Barclay: I have met the hon. Lady, and she made her case in a characteristically powerful fashion. The matter is being looked at actively.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: As I understand that the point of order flows from Health questions, I will take it if it is brief.

Jonathan Ashworth: Very brief, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care said that he would place the details of the funding settlement in the Library, but the paper has not yet been deposited. Mr Speaker, given the implications for higher tax and spending, will you use your good offices to ensure that that paper is deposited as soon as possible?

Mr Speaker: I dare say that it will be, but the Secretary of State has heard the hon. Gentleman and is nodding enthusiastically from his sedentary position, and I take the nod as an indication of good intent.

Mr Hunt: I am happy to confirm that we will do that forthwith.

Mr Speaker: Forthwith. Splendid. The hon. Gentleman looks satisfied—at least for now.

We have an urgent question in a moment from Alison Thewliss. I advise the House that it is on an extremely important matter that warrants urgent treatment on the Floor of the House, but it does not warrant treatment at length. I do not intend to run it for any longer than 20 minutes, because there is other business to protect.

Glasgow School of Art

12.36 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to respond to the fire at the Glasgow School of Art.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): As the House will be aware, a fire broke out at Glasgow School of Art's renowned Mackintosh building on the night of 15 June. The building is one of Glasgow's iconic landmarks and is regarded as Mackintosh's greatest work. It is rightly of global architectural significance and a unique and irreplaceable building in the eyes of many people worldwide. The art school itself is a work of art—a jewel in a city that sparkles with architectural splendour. It is worth noting that the building next door, the O2 ABC music venue, has also been affected, and it is even older and has a colourful and varied history. The art school was never a museum piece, but a living, breathing, working art school—a powerhouse of creativity and a much-loved part of the fabric of Glasgow. We can be grateful, however, that the tragedy was not worsened by loss of life, and my heartfelt thanks go out to the emergency services, particularly the fire service, who attended the scene under such adverse conditions and in the heart of the vibrant city's nightlife.

Many people, such as myself, are still in disbelief that this could happen again after the devastating fire of 2014, particularly given the painstaking and careful efforts that have taken place to restore the building over the past years. I visited the building on 1 June as the guest at the opening of the 2018 degree show and saw the restored library and the famous “hen run”. I was struck by the love and passion of those involved in restoring the building. I am personally devastated by the fire, a fact which I communicated directly when speaking to the school's director, Professor Tom Inns, over the weekend. My heart goes out to the school, its students and supporters, who did so much to raise funds for the restoration after 2014.

At this point, we do not know the cause of the fire, but I note that the fire service has assured us that a comprehensive and professional probe will be carried out in due course. The UK Government previously gave £10 million to rebuild the school after the last fire, and we stand ready to help again. There was never a question about the need to rebuild and restore the building when tragedy struck four years ago. The situation is far worse after the weekend's fire, but I hope we can start with that aim in mind.

Obviously, there are real questions about what will happen next. We stand ready to work with the school, the city council and the Scottish Government. I am visiting the site and meeting the head of the school on Friday, and I will update Members when I am in a position to do so.

Alison Thewliss: I thank the Secretary of State for his comprehensive response and for the support he has given.

The loss of the Glasgow School of Art, particularly in the 150th anniversary year of Mackintosh's birth, is a very sore loss indeed for the city. As the Secretary of State mentioned, the building is internationally significant and is held very precious in our hearts in Glasgow. All

who have visited and studied there, and even those who have not been inside, feel that the building belongs to the city of Glasgow and to each individual.

It is a catastrophe to lose the building, and my heart goes out to the staff at the GSA, to Professor Tom Inns and his staff, to those who worked on the restoration and particularly to the craftspeople who put so much love, care and attention into bringing back skills that have gone out of fashion to bring the school back to its former glory.

The Secretary of State is right to mention the vibrant O2 ABC venue, which was very much part of the cultural scene in the city of Glasgow. That will also be a very sore loss to Glasgow.

Like the Secretary of State, I pay tribute to the Scottish fire and rescue service, which pumped water uphill from the Clyde to try to douse the huge flames of the inferno on Friday night; the police, who kept everybody safe; and the Salvation Army, which was on hand to provide rolls, sausages and Irn-Bru to the Weegie fire crews. They did a tremendous job in reacting to the fire, too.

Does the Secretary of State agree that speculation at this time about the future of the building and the cause of the fire is unhelpful and that we should allow the experts in the fire and rescue service to do their investigations and to carry out their very detailed work, which may take some time to reach a conclusion? It is important that we get the answers and that we learn the lessons of this fire.

Will the Secretary of State support looking at all options to ensure that traders and residents of the Sauchiehall Street and Garnethill area are supported through this and are given the financial support they need? Will he look at the further detail of whether sprinklers can be made mandatory in historic buildings?

Finally, I am glad to hear that the Secretary of State is offering support for the renovations, and I look forward to hearing more on that in the coming weeks. Can he confirm that he will give more support for donations coming from other sources and that he will use the Government's efforts to bring in more money?

David Mundell: The House can hear the hon. Lady's passion for the Glasgow School of Art, which is reflected across the city of Glasgow, across Scotland and across the world. She is right that speculation is unhelpful at this time, which is why I do not support calls at this stage for a public inquiry. The investigations that would normally follow a fire and the detailed investigations that are under way should be allowed to follow their course. Of course, some of those investigations will be into the structure of the building and will determine what can happen next.

As I have said, I want to work with the school, the city council and the Scottish Government once views are formulated on how a restoration can be taken forward. We stand ready to help, as we did in 2014. I will discuss the traders, businesses and residents around the Glasgow School of Art with the Scottish Government and the council.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): My daughter-in-law is a postgraduate of the Glasgow School of Art, which is a much loved institution. Will the Secretary of State

[Stephen Kerr]

undertake to come back to the Dispatch Box when things are much clearer, so that we can get a clear understanding of what the UK Government's undertaking will be?

David Mundell: Yes, I am happy to do that. As the original questioner indicated, it is clear that it may take some time for there to be clarity about what will happen next, and I am certainly willing to come back to the Dispatch Box.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) for securing this urgent question. I fully support her efforts, and I am sure all Glasgow Members will stand in total solidarity to ensure we get the best outcome possible for our city.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art, that magnificent edifice that dominates the skyline of Garnethill, is the epitome of what it means to be a Glaswegian. It embodies the very essence of the city's character and soul, and is a true example of human genius. The grief I experienced after the first fire in 2014 was profound; it felt like part of our city had died that day. Now to witness an even more severe conflagration consume this precious art nouveau masterpiece has left me both angry and incredulous that it could have happened again. What on earth has gone wrong here?

More generally, this fire represents a wake-up call for Glasgow and the entire country. We need to have a much more robust approach to protecting our amazing Victorian architectural legacy in Britain in the future or we will continue to see these tragic losses mount up as buildings of these ages continue to suffer degradation. Government at all levels—city, Scottish and British—needs to step up to meet this challenge with radical and imaginative measures.

The good thing about the Glasgow School of Art is that the past four years have seen a meticulous process of understanding the building take place. The work of the architects and craftspeople has been extraordinary. We therefore have a critical mass of knowledge and understanding of this iconic building and its construction that makes it easier than ever before to restore Mackintosh's original vision. They are geared up and more than ready to take on that challenge, and I will be making the strongest possible case that they should be allowed that chance.

In the face of reckless calls to tear the building down, what plans do the Government have to support the safeguarding and renewal of such an iconic and important cultural asset for the world? What conversations has the Secretary of State had with the Scottish Government on the need to safeguard the building and ensure it is appropriately restored? Given that Glasgow needs a more preventive, comprehensive strategy for preserving its ageing stock of Victorian architecture, much of which is vulnerable to fire, what plans do the Government have to support a review of the way that heritage buildings are managed and safeguarded, with fire prevention policy as a priority? What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Scottish Government on the need to set up an investigation into the safety measures taken by the contractors for the restoration works? All I

would say in conclusion is that the people of Glasgow deserve roses as well as bread, and the Mack will rise again.

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman raises important points, and I know that he has a strong personal connection with the School of Art. Like those people who have been part of it, he feels this tragedy, but, as the hon. Member for Glasgow Central said, people who have never crossed the threshold of the School of Art feel it, too. I feel particularly for those craftsmen who restored the "hen run" and the library, bringing back these crafts, and how they must be feeling this week, when their work has been decimated. I take on board the points he makes about safety issues in buildings. The Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis), who is responsible for heritage in the UK and is in his place, will also have heard what he said and we will respond specifically to that.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): As a representative of many of the students and staff of the school, and as a former frequent visitor to the ABC, this fire was a real blow to me. When the Secretary of State meets representatives of the school on Friday will he talk about ways in which the community and alumni can most appropriately help with any fundraising efforts for future restorations?

David Mundell: I most certainly will do that. The effort to raise funds after the 2014 fire was tremendous. One way in which the Government can help is through Government funding, which can be a catalyst for other funding coming in. That was very much the case in 2014, and it is very much in my mind at this time.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): This was a cruel and gut-wrenching blow to the people of Glasgow, coming just as the refurbishment from last time was nearing completion. Last night in this House we demonstrated our ability to disagree with each other and have a vigorous debate, but I am pleased that this morning we are seeing all shades of political opinion in Scotland come together in solidarity with the people of Glasgow as they deal with this great tragedy. I want to ask a couple of specific questions. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government said that it was a matter for the owners of buildings to determine whether or not to install sprinklers. What action does the Secretary of State for Scotland think the Government should take to ensure that sprinklers are installed in such public buildings? He mentioned the need for a thorough investigation. Does he agree that erroneous press speculation on the cause of the fire before that investigation is complete is unhelpful and undesirable?

David Mundell: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point: press speculation on the cause of the fire is very unhelpful. We need to let those people who are carrying out the professional investigation get on with it. I also agree that it is important that all levels of government—the city council, the Scottish Government and the UK Government—work together, and whatever our other differences, I absolutely commit to do that. The issue of sprinklers has been debated extensively in the House in recent times. The hon. Gentleman will be

aware that a sprinkler system was in the process of being installed in the building, but sadly that process had not been completed.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Glasgow School of Art has a base in Moray; I spoke to people at the Altyre campus this morning, and they asked me to express their sympathies and thoughts for everyone involved in Glasgow. What can our constituents throughout Scotland do to support the efforts to restore Glasgow School of Art?

David Mundell: When I visited the School of Art on 1 June, I met some of my hon. Friend's constituents from Moray who had raised very considerable sums of money for the first restoration. Although those fundraisers will be as devastated as the rest of us, I am sure that, given the vigour and passion that I witnessed, they will stand ready in Moray and throughout Scotland to start the process again.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): As we know, highland chieftains are very good at getting rich clan members and estates to help to pay for repairs to the roofs of their castles and mansion houses. There are some extremely well endowed art-supporting funds out there, in the US and the rest of the world; what efforts will be made to see whether they would help to pay for the restoration?

David Mundell: I am sure that every effort will be made, because the School of Art has a world-class fundraising operation. It has alumni around the world and, indeed, campuses around the world—for example, I had the pleasure to visit the campus in Singapore. We stand ready to help and support the School of Art in any of those efforts, but one thing that the experience over the past four years has demonstrated is its skill and ability in respect of fundraising.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What caused the fire four years ago? Does the Secretary of State share my general concern that, given modern safety standards, far too many fires are breaking out in large buildings in this country—for example, the London hotel fire last week—that are either undergoing or have recently undergone renovation?

David Mundell: The issue of renovations has been the subject of some comment in recent days, and it merits some attention.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Prior to my being elected to this House, I had the great honour not only of being the bailie for Garnethill, in which the GSA is found, but of having done most of my postgraduate study in the bowels of the Mack building. In resurrecting the GSA, with its critical role as a place of artistic education, what work will the Secretary of State do in conjunction with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), the Member for the Scottish Parliament for Glasgow Kelvin and the Lord Provost of Glasgow, who also now represents Garnethill?

David Mundell: One thing that was clear when I visited the School of Art on 1 June was the wish to get students back into that building to see it as a functioning building for students, and there were detailed plans

about which students and courses would be taught there. I am absolutely sure that if a restoration can go ahead, the School of Art will very much want the building to return to being a living, breathing art-school building. I will certainly do everything that I can to support that.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I welcome the Secretary of State's comments and the cross-party nature in which this tragedy is being approached. Does he agree that the craftspeople, artists and performers who often perform at the O2 ABC need to be supported with specific funding, along with local shop owners? In the short term, before the big fundraising efforts take place, what can he do to ensure that they are specifically supported?

David Mundell: I am happy to look into the detail of that specific point, because it is relevant. I understand that several events that were due to take place have been rearranged and will go ahead at other venues in Glasgow. I am happy to take forward any specifics that flow from the hon. Lady's question.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The sense of devastation is felt so keenly in Glasgow because Charles Rennie Mackintosh's work has touched our lives in many different ways—for example, I have been to the weddings of my sister and some of my best friends at the House for an Art Lover. The Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society is based in another of his masterpieces, the Queen's Cross church, which is just around the corner from my constituency office. Will the Secretary of State make sure that the society is included in any communications or information flows that the Government initiate?

David Mundell: Yes, I am happy to do that. As a previous contributor said, it is a great irony that Mackintosh's 150th anniversary was only on 7 June, when we saw, through the worldwide celebrations, how relevant he remains around the globe.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Mackintosh once lived in a house just three doors down from where I currently live, but the Secretary of State will know that that is not the only place we can learn about Mackintosh: an exhibition is on right now at Kelvingrove Art Gallery, and it is open until the middle of August so that people can learn about his work. Will the Secretary of State encourage everybody to go and see it?

David Mundell: I most thoroughly encourage everyone to go along to that Mackintosh exhibition in Kelvingrove and, indeed, to visit any of Mackintosh's other properties, if they have not done so, or attend the Willow Tea Rooms in Sauchiehall Street.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I agree with and associate myself with the remarks that everyone has made about the heartbreaking scenes on Friday night. Does the Secretary of State agree that the creative arts and creative industries can find young people work in a way that conventional industry cannot? Will he take that into account when he considers what Government funding will be available?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. We do not always agree, but I do believe that the creative industries are a much undervalued part of our economy. They have played a huge part in Glasgow's regeneration and are an enormous part of Edinburgh's success as a global festival city, and they merit more attention.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Last year, some Members from Glasgow were given a tour of the painstaking restoration of the Mackintosh building by the School of Art's director, Professor Tom Inns, who told us how the team who had been involved in the restoration of Windsor castle had offered their advice. Will the Secretary of State join me in thanking the international teams that are appearing to offer their advice, both practical and financial? Like the people of Glasgow, we are not kept down for long, and nor will be the Mack.

David Mundell: The hon. Lady ends her question with a very good sentiment, and I echo it fully. The School of Art has been able to draw on worldwide expertise and to develop and see through skills that were not previously exercised, and it stands in a good position to know what would be needed in a future restoration, although the scale of this restoration would obviously be much greater than the previous one.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I am someone who delivered to Glasgow for 25 years as a postal worker, and the Mackintosh building was one my favourite buildings to deliver to. Will the Secretary of State not only deliver on the promise that he has just given to re-fund the building, but bear in mind the students and workers in the building?

David Mundell: One of the issues that I will discuss with Professor Inns and others is students, workers and the current capacity, because although the Mackintosh building was in effect destroyed, the School of Art's principal building was also badly damaged in terms of its operability. We want to discuss those issues and how they can be most helped in that regard.

Cannabis-based Medicines

12.58 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the medical use of cannabis.

Over the weekend, I issued an emergency licence to allow Billy Caldwell's medical team to access cannabis-based medicine to treat life-threatening seizures caused by a severe form of epilepsy. This was an emergency procedure, which was led by a senior clinician with the support of the medical director at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.

I am pleased to say that Billy has now been discharged from hospital. It is now for his senior clinicians to develop a long-term care plan. I am sure that the whole House would like to join me in expressing our sympathy for what Billy and his family have been going through and the very difficult time that they have faced.

The course of action in this case was unprecedented. There is strong scientific evidence that cannabis can harm people's mental and physical health and damage communities. There are currently no legally recognised medicinal or therapeutic benefits. To date, under successive Governments, Home Office policy has been to permit the production, supply and possession of raw cannabis solely for the purposes of research with a Home Office licence. The cannabis-based medicine Sativex can, however, be prescribed in the UK because there is a proven case for its safety and efficacy. However, cases such as Billy's, Alfie Dingley's and others like them, have shown that we now need to look more closely at the use of cannabis-based medicines in the healthcare sector in the UK.

It has become clear to me since becoming Home Secretary that the position we find ourselves in is not satisfactory. It is not satisfactory for the parents, it is not satisfactory for the doctors, and it is not satisfactory for me. I have now come to the conclusion that it is time to review the scheduling of cannabis. Before I go into the detail of the review, let me be absolutely clear that this step is in no way the first step in the legalisation of cannabis for recreational use. This Government have absolutely no plans to legalise cannabis, and the penalties for unauthorised supply and possession will remain unchanged. We will not set a dangerous precedent or weaken our ability to keep dangerous drugs off the streets.

The approach that we will be asking the review to consider will be no different than that used previously for controlled drugs where there is evidence of medicinal benefits. The Government review will take place in two parts. Part 1 of the commission will consider the evidence available for the medicinal and therapeutic benefits of cannabis-based medicines. Professor Sally Davies, who also serves as the Chief Medical Officer, will take that part forward. It will then inform exactly which forms of cannabis or cannabis-based medicines should be taken forward to part 2.

Part 2 will be led by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. The ACMD will not reassess the evidence issued by Professor Sally Davies, but will provide an assessment, based on the balance of harms and public health needs, of what, if anything should be rescheduled. If the review identifies that there are significant medical benefits, we will reschedule. We have seen in

recent months that there is a pressing need to allow those who might benefit from cannabis-based products to access them. It will, of course, take time for Sally Davies and the ACMD to complete their work and for the Government to consider their recommendations.

In the short term, my hon. Friend the policing Minister announced yesterday that the Government would be establishing an expert panel of clinicians to advise Ministers on any applications to prescribe cannabis-based medicines. This is intended to ensure that advice to Ministers on licensing in these cases is clinically led, based firmly on medical evidence and as swift as possible. The chief medical officers across the UK have already been actively working together on the panel, and the expert panel will start considering applications within a week.

Earlier today, my hon. Friend the policing Minister also spoke to Alfie Dingley's mum, Hannah Deacon, and informed her that we would issue a licence for Alfie later today. All of the work I have outlined today is about making sure that we keep in step with the latest scientific evidence, and that patients and their families have access to the most appropriate course of medical treatment. I pay tribute to the Policing Minister for all his excellent and sustained work on this important issue.

As a father, I know there is nothing worse than seeing your child suffer. You would do anything to take away their pain. That is why I have the utmost sympathy for Billy Caldwell, Alfie Dingley and many others like them, and for their parents who have been under unimaginable stress and strain. I know that they are following a gut parental instinct to do whatever is in their power to alleviate the suffering of their child. Today I would like to say to this House that I will do everything in my power to make sure that we have a system that works so that these children and these parents get access to the best medical treatment. I commend this statement to the House.

1.4 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for prior sight of his statement. I am well aware of the damage that cannabis consumption can cause, whether it is the health of very young consumers or ganja psychosis. The newer forms of cannabis, notably skunk, are very much stronger than the cannabis available a generation ago. However, I am also aware, as the Home Secretary will be, that a former chairman of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, Professor Nutt, has said that cannabis is less harmful than alcohol. I note that Baron Hague of Richmond is calling for complete decriminalisation.

The Opposition welcome the Home Secretary's statement that he will look more closely at the use of cannabis-based medication in healthcare in the UK. We agree that this is the right time—if not long overdue—to review the scheduling of cannabis, and we are glad to hear that the policing Minister has spoken to Alfie Dingley's mother. After the meeting in 10 Downing Street, she was very concerned about the length of time that it was taking to issue a suitable licence.

The Home Secretary has released some of the supply of medication that Billy Caldwell's mother brought into the country, but does he intend to release the complete supply? Is he aware of the concern at the delays in the

current process? Although we welcome the review, something must be done to manage the current process more effectively, including the use of an advisory panel. It is simply not acceptable that parents and families have to suffer, as they have been, as a result of the interminable delays in agreeing licences.

Cannabis and the drug issue generally are big issues of concern for the community. It is important that we base whatever we do on scientific fact and evidence, and we do not just bow to what might be popular sentiment. There are harms connected with cannabis consumption, but it is time to move forward and establish once and for all the potential of cannabis-based medicine to alleviate pain and suffering.

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments and her support for my statement. I think she agrees with me that it is absolutely the right time for the Government to look at this issue. She will be aware that under successive Governments, policy in this area has not changed for a long time, but given what we have all seen and heard all too clearly on our television screens, on the radio, and given the many meetings that my hon. Friend the policing Minister has had with the families affected, it is the right time to look at this issue and act as quickly as possible.

There are two parts to our action. I wish to reassure the House—all hon. Members will appreciate that rules of this type cannot be changed overnight. The changes have to be based on evidence. If they are not and are not properly made, some people out there may have different views and may try to challenge the rules legally. They have to be sufficiently robust. That is why we have put in place this process and why we wanted to act as quickly as possible. Professor Sally Davies' office has said that she can complete her work within a week. We are moving as fast as we possibly can, and I hope that the ACMD can then act within weeks.

At the same time, we do not want any other families to suffer, so we want to ensure that we have a process in place to act much more swiftly. That is why we have established the expert panel. The chief medical officers from all the devolved nations, including Northern Ireland, are involved in that, so we are co-ordinating and will work well together. The expert panel will be able to act very swiftly and Ministers will be able to take action very quickly based on medical advice, which is what we all want to see.

The right hon. Lady asked me about Alfie Dingley. As I mentioned, we will be issuing the licence today. Alfie's mother has already been informed and is of course very happy with the decision. I am sorry that she has had to wait so long and go through all the distress that she has faced. I am grateful to the policing Minister for all the work that he has done, and to Alfie's mother's Member of Parliament—the Attorney General, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright)—for all the work that he has done.

The right hon. Lady asked me about Billy Caldwell's situation. We are working very closely with the family. Now that the licence has been issued, we will ensure that the right amount of medicine is available for the right time. The situation depends somewhat on whether Billy Caldwell's mother decides to go back to Northern Ireland, because licensing is an entirely devolved matter. We are

[Sajid Javid]

working closely with the Northern Ireland authorities to ensure that, if she does decide to go, the move is seamless and does not affect Billy Caldwell in any way.

The right hon. Lady is interested in how quickly we acted. The first time we received a request from a clinician in the case of Billy Caldwell was at around 11.15 am on Friday just gone; by noon I had issued a licence and the drug was in possession of the family. I do not believe that we could have acted any quicker from the point at which we received a request from the clinician.

Once again, let me say that I really appreciate the right hon. Lady's comments. By working together, we can bring to an end the suffering of all these families and help in every way that we can.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and the rapid way in which he has gripped this issue. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for drug policy reform, let me say that this is a very welcome step forward. There is a substantial amount of medical evidence out there, including a 2016 paper on this issue—commissioned by my predecessor co-chairs of the APPG—by Professor Mike Barnes, who has been associated with the Alfie Dingley case. Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that Professor Sally Davies has been given two tasks, including one on the expert panel to advise on immediate applications for licences? Will he confirm that people will not be asked to pay the swingeing fees that were being asked of the Dingley family in respect of their licences? Finally, what is the expected timescale for the second task that my right hon. Friend has asked the chief medical officer to undertake?

Sajid Javid: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments, the work that he has done in this area over a number of years and the interest that he takes in the issue. I can confirm that Professor Sally Davies is helping—first with the expert panel so that we can bring help before the review is complete, and then of course with the review itself. He also mentioned the important issue of fees, which I am looking at to see how we can help.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for his statement. May I just gently say to him that it would be nice if the third party could have a little bit more advance notice than the statement literally being put in my hand as he gets to his feet? That said, I am pleased about the statement.

The Home Secretary is making significant progress in this area. I am particularly pleased for the individual families concerned, and to read about the review, but of course there are thousands of people across the United Kingdom who want to access these medicines for the treatment of conditions for which there is evidence that they can alleviate the symptoms and pain. These individuals and their families are worried about the bureaucracy and the hurdles that have to be crossed to access the medicines. Can the Secretary of State give me some assurance that his review will focus on removing bureaucracy and hurdles? Does he agree that this matter should eventually be seen as a public health matter that should be taken out of the Home Office and put into the hands of health departments across the UK?

In the meantime, I am pleased to hear that the chief medical officers of the devolved countries are involved, but will the Secretary of State confirm what other liaison there is—with the Scottish Government, for example—in relation to both health and policing, which has been mentioned, as these are devolved matters?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her comments. She is right to highlight that thousands of people may be suffering. No one knows the exact number, but it is estimated that at least 10,000 children in the UK have a drug-resistant form of epilepsy. That really puts into focus what a big difference these measures can make. I can also give her an assurance about bureaucracy and hurdles. Frankly, there has been a lot of bureaucracy and many hurdles in the way until now. The decision that we made on Friday was unprecedented, as are the measures that we are putting in place. The expert panel will make a huge difference. Its whole purpose is to make the process as smooth and quick as possible, based on medical advice at all points. I do not want to prejudice the review, but I am sure that the hon. and learned Lady can sense the direction.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on cannabis: harmful effects on developing brains, I thank my right hon. Friend for his assurances that any future medicinal use of cannabis will not be conflated with any weakening of the Government's position on recreational use. Is he aware of the increasingly clear evidence of permanent psychosis and depression among young people who are users of what we see on our streets more regularly—skunk cannabis?

Sajid Javid: I am very much aware of that. It is perfectly correct for my hon. Friend to highlight this point. As I made clear in my statement and I am happy to make absolutely clear again, there are no plans at all to decriminalise cannabis. It is a controlled class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and that will not change.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): All of us must want children—and also adults—to get the medical treatment that they need without additional hurdles that have nothing to do with medicine. I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement that he will look at the scheduling of cannabis, because it is incredibly hard to explain the scheduling classification of cannabis compared to opiates, and the additional burdens that that scheduling poses for the health service if such products are needed for treatment. May I ask him again to look more widely at the barriers and obstacles in his review? Will he look at whether these kinds of scheduling or licensing decisions should be passed to the Department of Health and Social Care, and whether much more drugs policy should, in fact, be led by that Department?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Lady makes a number of good points. She is right to highlight that there are currently drugs that are under schedule 2, meaning that the medical benefits are accepted, but which can be a lot more harmful than other drugs if they are used in the wrong way. She asked about the role of the Department of Health and Social Care in these kinds of decisions. This requires a cross-Government approach, with the

Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care working closely together, as we have seen. We have an issue in that these drugs are categorised as illegal under the Misuse of Drugs Act, but we need to recognise, where appropriate, that some of them have medicinal benefits, as has already been recognised with, for example, cocaine and morphine. It is therefore appropriate that the two Departments work together.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I absolutely understand the Government's review of this policy, and I welcome it for those who suffer and need this drug to make them better, but may I just say that, from my own life experience, I am delighted that the Government are not going to decriminalise the use of drugs. All too often, people start on cannabis and end on something far worse, and I have personally seen the devastation to families and the loss of children because of drugs.

Sajid Javid: I agree wholeheartedly.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I welcome the move that the Home Secretary has made, on behalf of my constituents. It is really important to me that the grandfather of Charlie Jones and the parents of Jace Newton-Sealey know how to go about applying for a licence. Will the Home Secretary and his Department make the process clear, so that people know how to access a licence?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I think that there is a need to make the process clearer. I have been quite open that I do not think that the current process is a friendly one at all. The decision made in the case of Billy Caldwell was unprecedented; no Government in the past had recognised the medicinal benefits of cannabis by making such a decision and issuing a licence. We need to make the process—even the interim process, through the expert panel—much smoother and more straightforward. Once the panel is set up, which will happen by next week, we will set out exactly how the process will work for the hon. Lady's constituents and others.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Clinical leadership may have its place, but for years the crying need has been for political leadership, so may I thank my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Policing Minister for providing it?

Sajid Javid: The Minister and I both thank my right hon. Friend.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I genuinely welcome this announcement, which does mark a significant shift, but is there not a dreadful hypocrisy in Government policy on drugs more generally? Probably most of the Cabinet drinks alcohol, the most dangerous drug of all. Probably half the Cabinet has used cannabis—maybe even the Home Secretary—unless it is a very odd group of people, but perhaps that is the case. Should not the Home Secretary follow the advice of the former Conservative leader, Lord Hague, who makes the case for a regulated, legalised market, which would be the best way to protect from harm people who, at the moment, buy from criminals who have no interest in their welfare at all?

Sajid Javid: This is about making sure that the best possible medical treatment is available for everyone in the UK, but especially our children. It is about medical treatment, not the recreational use of drugs, which can cause severe damage to people. I am afraid that I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman on that point, and nor, on this occasion, do I agree with Lord Hague.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for very much humanising this issue. As chairman of the all-party group on multiple sclerosis, I welcome his announcement about the medical aspect of cannabis. May I offer the services of the MS Society in any inquiry and call for evidence that he might have? May I also associate myself with his remarks about drugs? I am frankly staggered that my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Hague—or indeed anybody else—could advocate such a thing. We will all have seen at first hand in our constituencies the devastation that cannabis causes. This is not recreational use—it steals lives and futures, and we must be robust in ensuring that it stops.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that point. He will know that Sativex, which has a cannabis base, is already licensed for those with MS, but today's announcement is about how we can improve on the medical use of cannabis even further.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I, too, genuinely welcome the licence for Alfie today, but what a scandal it is that it has taken three months since Hannah Deacon met the Prime Minister and was promised swift and compassionate action, and what an outrage it is that, frankly, it is only the press attention that has finally shamed the Government into action. With regard to the expert panel, what assurance can the Home Secretary give that there will be enough Home Office staff to deal with the thousands of applications that might well now come?

Sajid Javid: Let me say gently to the hon. Lady that in the case of Alfie Dingley, of course we are all pleased that we have been able to issue the licence today. She should know that before the application—the approach by his clinicians—no Government had even entertained the idea, given that cannabis is classed as a schedule 1 drug, of looking at this from a medical point of view. This Government have done that. I hope that she can join us in not just welcoming that, but working together on how we can end the suffering of so many other people, particularly children, who could benefit from these kinds of medicines.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I commend the Home Secretary for his statement. I support the legalisation of cannabis for medical use. May I urge him to encourage the clinical review team to get on with it? There is already a mass of internationally accredited research available that they can draw on, so we do not need to reinvent the wheel. The research is there—it just needs to be studied and then a decision can be made quickly.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes a good point. One of the issues has been that our rules in this area have not kept up with medical research and evidence. At least 13 European countries, as well as Canada and over

[Sajid Javid]

30 US states, have recognised the medicinal benefits of cannabis. The World Health Organisation has also done work on this and pointed to evidence. We will be using and drawing on all that evidence. That is why I am pleased that Professor Sally Davies has said that she can complete her work in days.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Home Secretary says that he wants a system that works. I am bit concerned about the role of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs in the light of what has happened in recent days. Is it still fit for purpose?

Sajid Javid: Yes, it is. It has an important role to play, which is to advise Ministers on the scheduling of drugs. If we are to change a scheduling, it is important to listen to its point of view.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I welcome the fact that the Home Secretary set out at the start of his statement that

“cannabis can harm people’s mental and physical health and damage communities.”

I also welcome the fact that any change will be science-led. Will he also look at international examples? He mentioned Canada, where a law was introduced very recently. Will he see what works—and, importantly, what does not work—with that law, in particular, because the evidence is mixed?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We will certainly be looking at international evidence. A lot has changed in the UK since the current rules were put in place, and we will take all that into account.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome what the Home Secretary has said today. I have long supported decriminalisation of the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes, not least having heard some really heartbreaking stories from my own constituents, particularly those with degenerative conditions, some of whom, sadly, passed away unable to get the pain relief and support that they needed. Given the speed at which this review will be undertaken, will the Home Secretary, the Policing Minister and the Attorney General be giving any guidance in the interim to police forces or the Crown Prosecution Service on the public interest in pursuing the impounding of material, or prosecuting individuals who are using it for medicinal purposes?

Sajid Javid: The current rules are clear. We have discussed today and debated in Parliament how we would like to see a change in the process, but until those rules change, they would have to be applied. The hon. Gentleman raises a perfectly good point about working with law enforcement agencies and making sure that they are taking emerging policy into account.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I have long advocated the use of medical cannabis and therefore very much welcome the Home Secretary’s announcement of a review. May I have assurances that that review will be

very much patient-centred and led by evidence of how the use of medical cannabis can help those with chronic conditions?

Sajid Javid: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that reassurance. The review must have the patient at its very heart and must be driven by medical evidence.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I welcome the statement, and particularly the news on Alfie Dingley. Of course, there is already evidence of the medical benefits of cannabis, because otherwise Sativex would not be available on licence. That is why it is so absurd that cannabis is still a schedule 1 controlled drug. I am therefore hopeful and confident that the review will lead to a recommendation to reschedule. Will the Secretary of State confirm that rescheduling could be carried out quite quickly and easily by means of a statutory instrument, meaning that we can get on with it?

Sajid Javid: First, Sativex was looked at for a particular condition. It is right that drugs are looked at the context of the condition that they are intended to help with. The hon. Gentleman makes a good wider point about whether, once the review is complete, we can get on with it, with any changes made quickly. That is exactly what I intend to do.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): As chairman of the all-party group on 22q11.2 deletion syndrome, I know many parents of children who have a rare genetic condition that often goes undiagnosed and, when diagnosed, is not always appropriately treated. From that experience, I am sure that Billy’s family welcome today’s statement. I welcome the fact that elements of the statement show that the Government look to the evidence and respond to the public interest, as well as that of the patient at the forefront.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right. The process should absolutely be clinically led. We should listen to evidence from clinicians while drawing on international evidence, too. That is exactly what should feed into the outcome of the review.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I think we all welcome the progress that is being made, but there are questions about people who need help now. My constituents Laura Murray and John Ahern have a one-year-old daughter, Bláthnaid, who has been diagnosed with Aicardi syndrome. She suffers very severe seizures throughout the day and her parents believe that these medicines could help. I will write to the Home Secretary with more details about that situation, but may I ask him how much discretion he still has, and how much he is willing to exercise?

Sajid Javid: As the rules stand, until the review is complete and changes are made, any use of cannabis for medicinal purposes will require a Home Office licence or, in the case of Northern Ireland, a licence from the Health Department there. I hope that what I have set out today has given reassurance that I recognise the need for action now, not tomorrow or in a few weeks or months. We need action now, and that is the purpose of the expert panel—to make this a much smooth, quick and clinically-led process.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement. I note that he is not going to reclassify cannabis, but will he look at how we deal with individuals in possession of a small amount of cannabis? To that end, will he look at Checkpoint, an alternative justice initiative by Durham police that aims to help individuals and to try to break the link between drugs and crime?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman is right: this is not about the reclassification of cannabis. He makes an important point about the need for law enforcement to work with others, including the many good groups out there, to try to get people off drugs once they have a problem. It is important to do more work on that.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement. Those treating my constituent, Caroline, are firmly of the view that she is alive today and living a good quality of life because her brain tumour has been slowed by the regular use of cannabis oil, but she is having to import that at a cost of hundreds of pounds every month. When can she expect her doctors to be able to prescribe that treatment? Is there anything she should be doing in the meantime to benefit from what the Secretary of State has announced today?

Sajid Javid: I do not know all the details of that case, but it might be good to look at the work of the expert panel that I have talked about. As I say, we will set out more details on that. Any changes to the rules will be made after the review and, as the House has heard, we are trying to do that as quickly as possible.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): The mainstream media have highlighted this week the heartbreaking cases of Alfie Dingley and Billy Caldwell. The Secretary of State has said that an estimated 10,000 children in the UK who suffer seizures could benefit from these medicines, as could many more people suffering from degenerative conditions. It has always been the case that he could grant a specific licence, but given his comments about the time that it will take the ACMD to reach a conclusion and to look at international evidence from Canada and the 13 EU countries, what is his estimate of how long it will be before we get a more streamlined system?

Sajid Javid: First, I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we will take the international evidence into account. I know that Dame Sally Davies will look at that too, as will the ACMD. I want that work to be done as soon as possible, but right now I want to streamline the process, which means that the work of the expert panel will be very important.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. It will be particularly welcomed by my constituents the Gray family, as Murray Gray suffers from a similar condition to Alfie Dingley and Billy Caldwell. I also welcome the speed with which

the Home Secretary will act, but I urge him not to be thrown off track or to allow anything to affect the rescheduling of cannabis, such as reactionary fear about its availability for recreational use.

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, and I reassure her that I will not be thrown off track.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Home Secretary very much for his statement and the urgency he has given this. I also thank the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service for all his hard work, which should not be ignored. My constituents Darren and Danielle Gibson took their eight-year-old daughter Sophia to Holland so that she could receive these drugs. It was very important that they did so, as that had a clear medical benefit for their child. The Minister will know—

Mr Speaker: Order. I express the cautious hope—it would probably be unrealistic of me to say this with enormous confidence—that the hon. Gentleman, whom we all love dearly, is approaching his peroration, at the end of which there will be an unmistakable question mark.

Jim Shannon: There certainly will be, Mr Speaker.

When I met the permanent secretary of the Health Department in Northern Ireland, he said that he would have some difficulty giving the go-ahead in Northern Ireland. He needs direction from the Home Secretary. What discussions has the Home Secretary had with the permanent secretary to facilitate this urgently for my constituent Sophia Gibson?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman will know that the decision to issue a possession licence is completely devolved in Northern Ireland, so it is outside the Home Office's area. That said, we want to work closely with Northern Ireland. The permanent secretary in my Department has been working with the permanent secretary in the Health Department in Northern Ireland. We want to help in every way possible, especially in the case of Sophia Gibson, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I have to say that I am a little perplexed by this. The Home Secretary is saying that there are currently no legally recognised medicinal or therapeutic benefits of cannabis. I am wondering what we are giving to Billy Caldwell that has led to such a turnaround in his situation and what we are proposing to give to Alfie Dingley, if it has no therapeutic benefits.

Sajid Javid: Under the current rules, those are not recognised. To be a bit clearer, all drugs that may or may not have a medicinal benefit are scheduled, and drugs in schedule 1, which is where cannabis is at the moment, are not recognised to have medicinal benefits under the law. That said, we of course want to look at the evidence, and to be led by evidence and clinicians, which was exactly why I made today's announcement and why I took action last week.

Points of Order

1.36 pm

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Where is everybody? I hope, in the light of the extraordinary accusations of the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), they are not behind the bike sheds having a spliff.

Mr Speaker: That is a most unworthy thought. The right hon. Gentleman articulates it with his usual brio and panache, but I think he errs on the side of pessimism in his assessment of the character of his colleagues.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday I attempted to raise a point of order, which I do not think was a point of order, so I will try again today. I wonder how I can get on the record how thrilled I am, along with colleagues across the House, that it will no longer be necessary to go to Holland to get the drugs for Alfie Dingley. I was inundated with requests to come with me, but we will now not have to be put behind bars to get Alfie the drugs he needs.

Mr Speaker: That is a very heartwarming point of order by the right hon. Gentleman. I must admit that I had wrongly anticipated him. I did not know that he was going to make the very serious point that he just made, which is appreciated and respected. I thought he was going to use the occasion to make an entirely bogus but amusing point of order about Harry Kane's two goals last night, which we all celebrate. I do not celebrate it when Harry Kane scores for Tottenham, although I know the right hon. Gentleman does, but I do celebrate it when Harry Kane scores for England.

Sir Mike Penning: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like to put on the record how difficult that announcement was for you, as an ardent Arsenal

supporter. I am sure that we all, including those from other countries in the United Kingdom, support England when they are playing other countries outside the United Kingdom, and especially when Harry Kane scores two goals.

Mr Speaker: We conclude our points of order today, people will have noticed, in a spirit of amity.

BILL PRESENTED

HOUSE OF LORDS (ABOLITION AND REPLACEMENT)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Frank Field presented a Bill to abolish the House of Lords and make provision for its replacement by a Senate.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on 26 October, and to be printed (Bill 230).

Mr Speaker: For the benefit of others, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) said, "26 October 2018, unless the Speaker can get him a better time." That is a very novel interpretation of the procedure.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Please, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: He is exhorting me to find a better time.

Frank Field: It is about the abolition of the House of Lords. They are overruling us.

Mr Speaker: I think the right hon. Gentleman may be investing me with powers that it be would joyous to have, but which I do not possess. The House seems to be in a good mood at the moment.

Representation of the People (Gibraltar)

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

1.39 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the representation of Gibraltar by a Member of the House of Commons; and for connected purposes.

All 14 of the UK's overseas territories are different; all are special. All share our monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, as their Head of State; most are internally self-governing. The overseas territory that now sits in a unique constitutional position post-Brexit is Gibraltar. It is the only territory within the European Union and will be leaving the EU with the UK on 29 March 2019. Its relationship with the European Union is quite different from any other part of the Union, in that it is a member of the single market, but not its customs union or Schengen, despite having a land border with the EU. Gibraltar is not to be confused with the Crown dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, which have very different constitutional arrangements and are not in the EU, now or in the future.

Few were surprised that Gibraltar voted remain in the EU referendum. This reflected its residents' concerns that the EU had played, at times, a role in balancing the often fractious demands of its giant neighbour. The good life and strong economy—a beacon in an area of high regional unemployment—I can but guess also played a part in its local vote for no change.

For over 300 years, Gibraltar and its people have played their part in support of Britain's history as a global leader in commerce and an international player of influence. It occupies a unique geographical position as the gatekeeper to the Mediterranean and has one of the Royal Navy's most important international bases. Whenever Gibraltar has been presented with a choice over its future, notably in the shared sovereignty referendum of 2002, Gibraltarians have rejected any change by vast margins. Gibraltar has been and continues to be an unwavering supporter of the UK. Its outstanding support during times of conflict has been continuous, and we have a close relationship built on trust and reciprocal loyalty. Similarly, the people of Gibraltar have strong support in this House. I salute the good work of my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on the overseas territories, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Gibraltar.

Since the decision to leave the EU, the people of Gibraltar and its Government have shown nothing but pragmatism and respect for the decision of the referendum. Nobody could fail to be impressed and reassured by the evidence given by the Chief Minister to the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union in January last year. The UK's Brexit vote must make us think anew and re-assert once more that the Rock is British and will remain so. Brexit provides us with an opportunity to build further on our relationship and further protect the Rock's rights and interests. That is best guaranteed

by a closer electoral bond, which would also send a clear message to Madrid about the perpetuity of that bond.

Unlike other overseas territories, Gibraltar does not have the option of formal independence, which, however unlikely, would be available to others should they so wish it. The 1713 treaty of Utrecht ceded Gibraltar to Great Britain in perpetuity. The treaty had a sting, in that Gibraltar can only be British or Spanish. Its own unilateral independence is not an option. Whereas most overseas territories have their own currencies or shared currencies—the Eastern Caribbean dollar, under the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union—or use the euro in some cases or the US or New Zealand dollar, only the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar and St Helena, with Tristan da Cunha and Ascension Island, share sterling as their domestic currency.

Gibraltar's truly unique feature, however, is that it already has electoral links with the UK, via its attachment to the South West region for representation in the European Parliament. That will disappear upon Brexit. The way to protect that attachment is for this Parliament to allow the people of Gibraltar direct representation in this House. There was a cogent argument given then that Gibraltar should be connected to the UK through electoral representation, and there is a clear argument now. Gibraltar's population is a little light numerically to qualify as a constituency. It has a population of 33,000, with an electoral roll of 23,000. However, this is in the same ball park as—I may need help pronouncing this—Na h-Eileanan an Iar in the Outer Hebrides, a constituency with 21,260 voters.

Of course, we will always respect the devolution of powers that are in place, and having a Gibraltar MP in this House should not be an impediment to Gibraltar's future constitutional development. Gibraltar's constitution of 2006 is a tribute to the fact that it has a vibrant and responsible democratic system of government. That is why my Bill would not change the devo-max settlement of its 2006 constitution. If taken further, it would not impose a Westminster MP on Gibraltar. The decision whether to take up the offer of an MP in Westminster for Gibraltar must be made by the residents of Gibraltar alone and decided by their own internal procedures. The mechanics of how that might work would need to be discussed with Gibraltar's leaders, but I reiterate that it would be for the people of Gibraltar to decide whether to have such representation here in our Parliament, which would become their own.

There is a local campaign group in Gibraltar, called the Representation in Westminster Group, that has been arguing for a number of years that a democratically elected MP in Westminster can only strengthen the Rock's link with Britain and act as a permanent counter to any Spanish claims. The campaign says that it has already collected almost 9,000 signatures in support of UK Parliament representation, which it will deliver here once 10,000 signatures have been amassed. That is an impressive number—close to half the eligible voters.

As we leave the EU and forge a new global Britain, and given the Rock's unique constitutional position with its membership of the sterling zone and rich historical links to Britain, there has never been a more appropriate time to cement our relationship with Gibraltar by offering it this constitutional bond. It would signal a perpetual and lasting link of shared interests. Gibraltar may be

[Craig Mackinlay]

small, but its success is a matter of pride for the British people. Gibraltar's constitution gives its citizens full powers of self-governance, other than over foreign affairs, defence, internal security and interest rate monetary policy. Gibraltar has always been and will continue to be a good and true member of the great British family. I very much hope that with this Bill we can reward the Gibraltarian people for their steadfast and loyal support for Britain.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Craig Mackinlay, Sir Graham Brady, Maria Caulfield, Sir David Crausby, Tim Farron, Daniel Kawczynski, Priti Patel, Andrew Rosindell, Sammy Wilson and Nigel Dodds present the Bill.

Craig Mackinlay accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October, and to be printed (Bill 231).

Opposition Day

[14TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Confidence in the Secretary of State for Transport

1.49 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has no confidence in the Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Member for Epsom and Ewell; notes the failed implementation of the May rail timetables which has left thousands of commuters without services and has drastically affected their everyday lives; believes Northern and Govia Thameslink Railway should have their franchises terminated; and regrets that the Secretary of State for Transport has failed to strategically manage and oversee the UK railway and take responsibility for his role in the crisis on England's railways, whilst officials at other organisations have resigned and forgone bonuses.

Before I come to the topic of today's debate, I would like to express my condolences to the families and friends of those who so sadly died as a result of being struck by a train at Loughborough Junction in south London yesterday. I also pay tribute to all the railway staff who attended in response, in particular the British Transport police. Despite the challenges we face, we can never forget the outstanding public service that tens of thousands of men and women provide every day. We owe it to them to do our very best for the industry.

I regret having to table the motion, but given the totally unacceptable state of the railway I felt that I had a duty to passengers. The latest chaos follows meltdown on the east coast, resulting in a £2 billion bail-out and huge cuts to promised electrification in Wales, the north of England and the midlands. This is not shaping up to be a distinguished legacy. In his resignation letter to staff, Charles Horton, the outgoing chief executive of Govia Thameslink Railway, said:

"In my view, this was an industry-wide failure of the timetabling process. But with leadership comes responsibility and so I feel it is only right that I step down".

Why is it that the chief executive of a train company who is responsible only for the travel disruption on one part of the railway is able to recognise the responsibility that comes with his leadership role and resign, yet the person who is truly responsible, the Transport Secretary, remains in post?

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, ever since the collapse of the west coast main line franchising competition under a predecessor of the Secretary of State, the entire franchising system has become increasingly ridiculous and unworkable, and that the way in which we run our railways needs to be changed entirely?

Andy McDonald: I could not agree more. We are seeing instance after instance. It is evidence, if any more were needed, that the system has completely and utterly failed and needs to be completely revised. Why are train companies allowed to retain their franchise despite repeated failures? Northern and GTR should be stripped of their contracts. Labour said very clearly that franchise

failure should mean forfeit. It is clear that the Department for Transport has failed to ensure that train companies fulfil the terms of their contracts.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is not only GTR that should lose its franchise? The Secretary of State should have his office removed as well because this is a façade of a franchise. We know that Ministers are behind it, and it is Ministers who should be held accountable for the fact that passengers in places such as Preston Park in Brighton are losing their jobs, cannot spend time with their kids in hospital and are having their lives wrecked.

Andy McDonald: I agree entirely. The Government seem to want to have control and intervene, but they do not want to take responsibility. GTR should have been stripped of its contract years ago for running the worst rail service in modern times. The company has repeatedly been found in breach of its contract as well as overseeing toxic industrial relations and poor customer service. Had the Government heeded Labour's call to strip the company of its franchise, the recent disruption could have been avoided.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con) *rose*—

Andy McDonald: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Huw Merriman: I thank the hon. Gentleman—he is always kind and courteous with his time. A month ago, I believe that he said at the Dispatch Box that the rail professionals should be allowed to get on and run the industry, but in this instance he is being critical of the Secretary of State for not intervening and stopping that very eventuality occurring. I would like some clarification.

Andy McDonald: I will come on to that. As an excellent member of the Select Committee on Transport, the hon. Gentleman knows that the DFT sits on those bodies—it has a presence—yet it did nothing when it was given those alarms or warnings that he knows all about.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Andy McDonald: I shall give way briefly, as I want to make progress.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): It is not many months since we had a problem with Southern, as has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). From time to time there are problems on the west coast main line, yet the Secretary of State sits there like Pontius Pilate and abdicates responsibility.

Andy McDonald: My hon. Friend make the point wisely and accurately.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a good speech. Yesterday, members of the Transport Committee sat for many hours interrogating leaders of the industry, both train operating companies and Network Rail, trying to find out who runs the railways. After all those hours, answer came there none. Does my hon. Friend agree that there are two scenarios?

First, the Secretary of State is in charge, in which case he should take responsibility; or even worse, he is not, in which case he should be sacked?

Andy McDonald: My hon. Friend makes the point very well. We are talking about a dysfunctional railway that is completely and utterly fractured, and that has to be resolved.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Andy McDonald: I will make progress, as I have taken several interventions and I know that many speakers wish to contribute. It is not acceptable to allow companies to continue to run and profit from rail services following failures on this scale. Services should return to public ownership to be run as part of an integrated railway under public ownership.

I turn to the distressing situation that confronts us more broadly on the railway as a result of the calamitous introduction of new timetables across more than half the UK rail network. The changes were intended to be improvements to introduce much-needed rail capacity following public expenditure on new rail infrastructure, but instead of improvements passengers on Northern and GTR have experienced a nightmare of disruption, and there seems to be little prospect of their trials and tribulations ending quickly. Last week, the *Manchester Evening News* carried a number of personal testimonies about the impact of the chaos. Leigh Burke, 55, is a team leader at Royal Bolton Hospital. He commutes from Didsbury to Bolton and said:

“I'm late to work all the time, it's affecting my job. It's an utter shambles.”

Louise Kirby, who commutes daily from Bromley Cross to Victoria, added:

“It's horrific. I keep having panic attacks because it's been so crowded. I saw a man pass out.”

Tom Moss, 24, a PR manager who lives in Glossop and works in Altrincham, pays £104 a month for his pass and said:

“I just want the trains to be on time. I just feel angry. I can't take much more of it.”

There are thousands more personal stories that I could describe: personal difficulties and struggles that have a significant social and economic impact. Businesses and individuals who rely on rail transport suffer consequences from this disruption that carry very real costs.

This is not just a one-off. Disruption of this scale and severity, particularly when passengers experience it endlessly over an extended period, destroys faith and trust in the railway and drives people away from rail into their cars. Last week, figures showed that rail passenger usage has fallen yet again—this time, the fall was the biggest in 25 years. Not only does that mean more congestion, worse air pollution and an increased contribution to climate change, but it threatens the very sustainability of the railway.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as well as appalling oversight by the Government, one of the main challenges facing the rail network is ageing and unreliable infrastructure? That is a particular problem for the east coast main line, which has not had any real investment since electrification in 1991, 27 years ago, despite its being one of the major national rail routes.

Andy McDonald: Indeed. The east coast main line is in need of investment, and my hon. Friend makes her point incredibly well.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD) *rose*—

Andy McDonald: I will give way once more, then I must make progress.

Tim Farron: That is very decent of the hon. Gentleman, and I am grateful to him. He is making an important speech. Does he agree that there is something of the red herring about conversations suggesting the new timetable is the source of the current calamity? Does he also agree that strategic decisions by the Government have led to the problem, which predates timetabling, not least the decision to postpone or, in the case of the Lakes line, cancel electrification, and to award to Northern certain franchises that it should never have been given, including the Lakes and Furness lines in my constituency?

Andy McDonald: I agree with those comments, and I will come on to that in a little while.

Franchise agreements assume ever-growing fare revenues, so the downturn in rail use increases the likelihood of more failed franchises and further taxpayer bail-outs. Fares have soared at three times the rate of wages since 2010, pricing passengers off the railway, while disruption encourages more people to revert to driving. That is exactly the wrong modal shift that we need our transport policy to achieve if it is to fulfil our environmental obligations and remove traffic and fumes from our towns and cities. Polling conducted by Which? found that three in five respondents affected by the timetable changes said that those changes had a negative impact on both their work and family life, with four in 10 saying that they had a negative impact on their health.

Considering the scale of the disruption, I am sure the whole House will agree that passengers must be adequately compensated. Yet at present 72% of those affected by the disruption said they had not been informed, either on the train or at the platform, about any compensation they may be entitled to receive. The Transport Secretary should have ensured passengers were made properly aware of the compensation they are owed. In addition, considering the scale of the disruption, a compensation package that goes above and beyond what is currently available must be delivered. The Transport Secretary has indicated some such package is being considered, but he has not provided detail. I ask him to do so today to ensure that the amount of compensation is commensurate with the scale of disruption and, importantly, that it is funded by the train companies, not taxpayers and passengers. They should pay voluntarily. If they refuse, he should make them.

It is important to step back and review the key steps in how we have come to this sorry state of affairs. This year's timetable changes, introduced on 20 May, are the most extensive and ambitious undertaken in decades. More than 50% of the network schedules have been revamped. Four million trains have been retimed: about six times as many changes as is usual for a timetable change. It was clear before Christmas that there were going to be difficulties in implementing the new timetable. In February, the rail industry body, the Rail Delivery Group, confirmed it would not be able to complete timetables 12 weeks ahead of travel from 20 May for about six months. That should have set off alarm bells.

Since 20 May, 43% of Northern's trains have been delayed or cancelled each day. From 4 June, the train operator cancelled 165 trains a day, including all services to the Lake district. In the first week of the new timetable, GTR delayed or cancelled a quarter of its trains and announced the schedule for the next day at 10 pm each night.

Today's industrial action on Northern is a reminder of the utter despair felt by the rail industry's workforce. Both Northern and GTR have waged war on their staff for three years and four years respectively. They have done so at the explicit behest of the Secretary of State for Transport and his senior officials.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): How does the hon. Gentleman explain that the Labour Mayor of London has been unable to run strike-free transport in London, although he promised to do so? Did he also anger staff in this way?

Andy McDonald: We can have that discussion, but today I am dealing with these services and I am going to concentrate on them.

Senior officials directly interfered. Let us not forget that the managing director of passenger services at the Department for Transport, Peter Wilkinson, said two years ago:

"we're going to be having punch-ups and we will see industrial action"

and that he wanted to run people "out of my industry."

The introduction of the May 2018 timetable required change on an unprecedented scale. The process of managing change requires co-operation, dialogue, engagement and good will. The Government and the management of Northern and GTR have destroyed their relationships with their employees. Millions of passengers in the UK are paying the price for the belligerence and the antagonistic approach of the Secretary of State.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I know the Secretary of State and I know his Ministers. I bet a pound to a dollar that the Secretary of State and his Ministers pulled in the people responsible for the railway companies and got assurances from them that this would work well. I really feel it is quite unfair, because I am absolutely convinced that the Secretary of State, who I know well, would have checked this out. He has been let down very badly by the railway companies.

Andy McDonald: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, but in support of my argument. He is demonstrating that that did not work. That was not a very good way of going about business, relying on people giving assurances rather than saying, "Show me. Where's your evidence?" You do that before you go ahead with it. You do not rely on people telling you nonsense.

Ever since the timetable chaos arose, we have witnessed carefully crafted statements that try to ensure as little responsibility as possible can be attributed to the Department for Transport and the Secretary of State in charge of it. Let us consider the situation. This is a Government who refuse to recognise the accumulated evidence that their privatised structure of the railway is failing. Therefore, they refuse to accept a sensible and practical railway structure that can function properly.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so generous with his time. He is a big supporter of privatisation—*[Interruption.]* He is a big supporter of nationalisation, but that would cost each and every household in this country £6,500. Does he not agree that the nationalised side of the railway caused this problem in the first place? How does he account for that?

Andy McDonald: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets that figure from. If the Government take franchises back when they run out it costs diddly squat to take them back—zero—so he is talking utter nonsense.

No one other than the Government hold responsibility for their dogmatic stance. This dogma causes them to stand by and defend the rail structure that is manifestly not fit for purpose. It then falls to the Department for Transport to get involved to try to run the railway properly. It cannot do this. Today's railway cannot run itself effectively because it was decapitated by privatisation and chopped into bits to facilitate private profit taking. Because there is no guiding mind overseeing the railway, the Department has to wade into the railway much more deeply than it should. Having taken this approach, the Government assume a greater deal of responsibility, but they have not shown themselves capable of discharging that responsibility.

The Department for Transport's oversight has failed in three major ways. First, it appears that, when there was a decision on whether to press ahead with the timetable changes affecting Northern, the Department stood against allowing a deferral. Why did the Department not believe the professional advice it was given? Secondly, the Transport Committee heard from Network Rail yesterday that Thameslink phasing was first raised by the GTR readiness board in June 2017. Mr Halsall, the route managing director for the south-east, said the Department stood by and did not make a decision until November 2017—an astonishing five-month delay. What did the Secretary of State know and when did he know it?

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I can confirm that the decision to proceed with a slimmed down timetable was taken by me in July 2017.

Andy McDonald: Well, I am saying to the Secretary of State quite clearly that a competent Secretary of State would have known this right at the outset and taken the appropriate steps. He did not. He allowed the situation to unwind.

Thirdly, the Thameslink industry readiness board—readiness board, there's a laugh—formally requested that the GTR timetable changes should be scaled back, yet the Department dithered for two months. GTR boss Mr Horton said the board did not have an executive role, so he could not explain who was responsible for the meltdown—no one accountable and no one responsible.

I do not want to personalise the issue and I do not expect the Secretary of State to know every detail of what happens in his Department—*[Interruption.]* No, it is just everything he does and everything he stands for; it's nothing personal. However, the three points I have described are all important failures of the Department for Transport at a high level. Stephen Glaister from the

Office for Rail and Road is not an appropriate person to conduct a review into the timetable failings. The ORR itself has failed in its regulation of Network Rail, so it cannot be expected to conduct an independent investigation. This is yet another bad judgment by the Secretary of State for Transport. A new rail timetable is due to be implemented in December 2018. What funds, resources and support will the Secretary of State provide to ensure Network Rail's planning capability can deliver the changes due in six months?

Today's *Financial Times* reports the managing director of Trenitalia complaining about Network Rail and, in particular, the lack of integration between Network Rail and the train operating companies since privatisation. Did the Italians not do their homework on the reality of the UK's railway? Recent events demonstrate more than ever that our railway is not integrated. I am afraid that the breach of faith and trust is so great that the Secretary of State's credibility will never recover. There comes a point when the publicly accountable politician in charge of the railway should step up and shoulder the blame. It seems to me, and I suspect to many rail users, that we have more than reached that point.

2.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): Before I respond to the points raised by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), can I just say a couple of things? First, I saw the comments that he made yesterday, and I thought he was very brave on the whole issue of medicinal cannabis—I pay tribute to him for that. The other thing is that I echo his words about the tragic events at Loughborough Junction yesterday. Our hearts go out to the families of those concerned and, indeed, to all those who dealt with what was clearly a horrible incident on the ground. We owe a huge amount to the British Transport police in particular and to staff across the railway who deal with horrendous situations like this from time to time. I am very grateful to them for what they did.

For years, the Opposition have demanded that the railways be renationalised and run by the Government, and they have claimed that they would be run much better if they were. Now it appears that they think the railways are already run by the Government, and that if something goes wrong, it is down to us. Frankly, I am going to let their confusion speak for itself and concentrate today on what really matters: getting things back into shape for passengers.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Chris Grayling: I will give way once or twice during my speech, but as you said, Madam Deputy Speaker, we need to make progress so that people get a chance to contribute. I am going to make some progress before I give way.

As I previously told the House, over the past weeks, passengers on parts of the GTR and Northern franchises have faced totally unsatisfactory levels of service, and I apologise to passengers that have experienced and are experiencing disruption. Since the timetable has been

[Chris Grayling]

introduced, my Department and the industry have been working round the clock to restore the reliability of the service across the network. Hour by hour, my officials are in contact with GTR, Northern and Network Rail to work to improve the service to passengers.

As I told the House, I have commissioned an independent inquiry. This will be led by the independent rail regulator, Stephen Glaister, to examine why we are in this situation and to avoid it ever happening again. I have met the owners of the franchises and demanded that they improve their operational response, including, in the case of GTR, increasing its managerial capacity. Clearly, nobody wants us to be in the position we find ourselves in today, but let me be absolutely clear: everyone in my Department is as focused as we possibly can be on improving reliability for passengers.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chris Grayling: I will give way to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron).

Tim Farron: The Secretary of State will be aware that for two weeks in my constituency, there were no services at all along the Lake district—the service into Britain's second biggest visitor destination. It took a heritage charter train to provide any service over the past few days, and I very much thank all those who were involved in making that happen. Does he agree that this is perhaps a sign that Northern, which is such a colossal franchise across the whole of the north of England, needs to be looked at in a more micro way? For example, we need to look at Cumbria and decide whether the Furness line, the coastal line and the Lakes line could instead be a separate franchise run by a provider that actually wants to run trains on a train line.

Chris Grayling: At the end of all this, I rule nothing out as regards the future structure of franchises. I obviously want to see the Lakes line recover to a normal service as quickly as possible. It has been a disappointment, actually, that the working practices between the employer and ASLEF have meant that it has not been possible to run a conventional service. That may seem extraordinary, but the employer agreements require that if one driver is taken off for training, all the drivers have to be. That is a strange situation. The Labour party talks about wanting to help passengers; it could put a bit of pressure on their union friends to relax some of those agreements now, so that we get the services back into shape as quickly as possible.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chris Grayling: I give way to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald).

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know of the misery—because I have told him—on my line, with five stations where people's lives have been blighted over recent weeks, but does he agree that privatisation does have one merit, which is that we can get rid of the operator if there is a huge crisis, and if this is not sorted out very soon, will he take the necessary steps to attack the franchise?

Chris Grayling: I am absolutely clear that that is the case. Indeed, as I will say in a moment, I have started the process of review to make sure that all options are open.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chris Grayling: I will take two more interventions; then I will make some progress.

Peter Kyle: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. The network is incredibly complicated, with a whole range of different providers, both publicly and privately owned. Does he understand that passengers look to the Government in their role of overseeing all the different providers? We do not have an independent board, with a chair and non-executives who scrutinise, challenge and support the network; we look to him as Secretary of State and to the Department. He is entirely reactive and not entirely proactive, which is what passengers need. Does he not accept some responsibility for what has happened—for the lack of oversight, the lack of scrutiny and the lack of challenge while this was happening, rather than just reacting afterwards?

Chris Grayling: I say very simply that the Labour party argues that the railway should be run by the rail experts. When the rail experts advise, as they did in early May, that they are ready for the timetable change—the train companies and Network Rail—it behoves Ministers to take the advice of those rail professionals. Labour is now saying that we should overrule the very people that it said, a few weeks ago, should be running the railways.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chris Grayling: I will give way one more time, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon).

Sir Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): I am really grateful to my right hon. Friend. On the review, whatever the ownership, these are essential public services—in getting our constituents to work and getting their children to school—so will he consider taking stronger powers for himself in times of disruption that would allow him to direct the rail operators to work more closely together or to put in additional stops to help those who simply cannot get to work in the morning?

Chris Grayling: Absolutely; I agree with my right hon. Friend. This is something that we will have to look at very seriously indeed. There are many lessons to learn from all this, but most immediately, we need to get services back into place for passengers. I have been watching the issues at Eynsford and Shoreham in his constituency. It feels as though they are getting a better service than they were but there is still some way to go, and we need to make sure that that is covered.

Debbie Abrahams: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Caroline Lucas: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Chris Grayling: I will make some progress before I give way again.

I would like to update the House on how the industry is working to improve the reliability of services. On 4 June, Northern introduced a temporary timetable, including a targeted reduction in trains by around 6% to achieve a more deliverable service. Even with this reduction in service, there are still more trains running across the whole Northern network than before the timetable change in May. That does not mean that there are not individual areas that still have very significant problems, and I am very conscious that many passengers are still experiencing significant disruption, but there are signs that the service is stabilising. Over the first two weeks of the reduced timetable, 80% of trains arrived on time and 4% were cancelled or arrived significantly late, which is a significant improvement. This is not nearly good enough, but it is an improvement on what was happening before the introduction of that timetable. Northern is planning to run the timetable until the end of July, when it will review and, we hope, significantly increase the number of trains running, while ensuring continued stability. Stability is the most important thing for passengers so that they know what is expected, when trains are going to come and that they are going to come.

Officials from the Rail North Partnership—it is worth reminding Labour Members that this franchise is managed as a partnership between my Department and the leaders of local authorities in the north. Decisions about it are taken by the partnership board of Transport for the North, and it has been considering how to respond—*[Interruption.]* The shadow Secretary of State says it does not exist. This is the most devolved franchise in England. Responsibilities for managing and overseeing the franchise are shared through the board of Transport for the North—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not like it, but that is the truth.

GTR is also working to increase the predictability and reliability of journeys on its network. It is working actively to reduce the number of on-the-day cancellations and is now updating its timetables a week ahead. There is clearly still a lot more to do. In too many places, there is very significant disruption, but we have to move things in the right direction. Alternative travel arrangements are in place—for example, for passengers on the Brighton main line, who can have their Thameslink tickets accepted on Gatwick Express. Next month, GTR will introduce a full temporary timetable across its network as the next step to improve reliability and performance for passengers. This will allow GTR to slowly build up services to the new full timetable.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chris Grayling: I will take two more interventions, and then I will make progress to the end of my remarks so that I do not take up too much speaking time.

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He will remember that we met on 4 June, when I relayed some of the real issues that my constituents in Oldham and Saddleworth were facing. He said that we should be seeing improvements to the emergency timetable. I said that I would hold him to it, and he also said that he would look at contingency arrangements if there were not improvements. I went back to Greenfield station last Friday and spoke to constituents who use

those trains. They said that they had seen only marginal differences, so will the Secretary of State now commit to bringing these franchises—Northern and TransPennine Express—in-house, and will he ensure that there is compensation for TPE passengers as well?

Chris Grayling: I will talk about compensation in a moment. I have been watching the performance carefully, and there have been some signs of stabilisation, as I say, but there is still a long way to go. *[Interruption.]* As I just set out, we have seen some stabilisation. I have been looking at the services day by day, and there is still a way to go, but the decline we saw after the timetable change has at least been arrested, and as the hon. Lady herself admits, there have been some improvements, although not nearly enough. I accept that, and I will take away her comments and look carefully at her line again, but there has been at least a stabilisation.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con) *rose*—

Chris Grayling: I give way to my right hon. Friend.

Mrs Miller: My right hon. Friend and I share a railway line, the Wessex route, which is under the stewardship of South Western Railway. It will be introducing a new timetable later this year. How will he ensure that the learnings from his independent inquiry are used to inform the implementation of the new timetable to avoid a replication of these sorts of problems in the future?

Chris Grayling: My right hon. Friend makes an important point—indeed, the shadow Secretary of State said the same. We will not go through with a timetable change in December that is not deliverable. A lot of working is being done right now to see what can and cannot be done. These problems cannot and will not be allowed to happen again. We also have new leadership at Network Rail. Andrew Haines, its new chief executive, stewarded the last major timetable change on the south-western network a decade ago, which went very smoothly. Andrew will be personally responsible for ensuring that any timetable change is deliverable.

I turn now to what happens next. We have seen some stabilisation on the Northern franchise, but I have yet to see any sign that GTR is getting to grips with the issue, so I have commissioned a formal review of the franchise to establish whether it has met and continues to meet its contractual obligations in the planning and delivery of the May timetable, including by ensuring sufficient capability and competence inside the group, and—importantly—to ensure that the owning groups invest sufficiently to minimise further disruption.

My main objective is to ensure there is a plan that I can have confidence in going forward. The review will inform my decisions about how to best use my enforcement powers and the next steps I can take with the owners of the franchise if they are found to be in breach of their obligations. Northern is a matter of ongoing discussion at the Transport for the North board. It has made progress, but not enough, and that is being closely monitored indeed.

[Chris Grayling]

The one thing on which I agree with the shadow Secretary of State is the need to put passengers first, and there are two areas where we have to work on that. I encourage all sections of the industry, including the trade unions, to put passengers first. Railway workers across the country are dedicated to providing a high level of service for their passengers and have been on the frontline facing the anger of passengers affected by the timetable disruption, and I am sorry they have had to experience that. I encourage trade union leaders to support their efforts and those of this industry to sort things out for passengers. It is a matter of great disappointment to me that the RMT has again today gone on strike on Northern at a time when the whole industry needs to work together to get the timetable back into shape.

The union makes spurious claims about safety, but trains have operated like this in the UK for more than 30 years. The London underground uses this system, as do trains around the network, and no one at Northern is losing their job or any pay. These changes will modernise the railway in the north and deliver better services for passengers and were signed up to by all the members of the partnership managing that franchise in the north. It is worth adding that on the Southern network, ASLEF, the train drivers union, reached a perfectly sensible agreement that should point the way forward. It is particularly disappointing, therefore, to see the Opposition acting effectively as a mouthpiece for a trade union that regards a Labour party led by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) as too right wing to affiliate to. I urge him and his colleagues to urge his union supporters to back down from this dispute, stop calling strikes at a time of disruption on Northern and work together to sort out these problems.

I am clear that passengers on these lines have been severely affected by these issues and need to receive additional compensation. My Department is working closely with the TfN board, Network Rail, train operators and stakeholders to introduce the right compensation scheme as soon as possible. It will be funded by the industry. The Rail Minister has already recommended to the board that passengers who buy weekly, monthly or annual tickets on affected Northern and TPE routes will be eligible to claim up to four weeks' compensation. As part of the scheme, the industry will provide financial support to TfN to deal with other costs that have arisen from the disruption, including on the Lakes line. There will also be a marketing campaign to encourage people to travel by train in the affected areas. I expect the TfN board to confirm the final details of the compensation scheme come its next meeting on 28 June and payments to begin in early July. I will confirm the full details of the compensation package for Thameslink and Great Northern customers on the affected routes at the same time. This will follow approximately the same approach as that on the Southern network. Because of the numbers of people involved, it will take a little longer to begin compensation payments, but I have told GTR that these need to begin before the end of July. Finally, we are considering options to further support the northern economy, and we expect Northern to fund a marketing campaign encouraging travel to affected areas by train when it resumes full operations, particularly on the Lakes line.

Political point scoring does not help passengers. We have seen that today. We need to work to deliver the best outcome for passengers and to improve services urgently. That is what I am focused on, what my Department is focused on and what the Government are focused on.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before I call the spokesperson for the Scottish National party, I need to tell colleagues that this is a well-subscribed debate, and we have another well-subscribed debate this afternoon, so after the SNP spokesperson, I will be imposing a six-minute time limit.

2.26 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Obviously, I echo the sentiments expressed by the two Front-Bench spokespersons about the accident yesterday and the workers who helped to keep people safe.

Another week, and here we are having another transport debate or statement. I am a little unsure of the Labour party's tactics in trying to shift the Transport Secretary from his position, because it seems to me that the longer he stays in post, the more incompetent he shows the UK Government to be—and they, unlike the franchises, have real competition. He finished by saying there was a lot of political point scoring and that we should all work together, but it would be best if he took on board some of the criticisms. Any criticisms made—or even valid observations—are dismissed out of hand as political point scoring, when they are not, especially given that the franchise system is on its knees.

We have seen time and again that the Secretary of State is blinkered and ideological. He is a hardcore Brexiteer with the mantra, "Everything will be just fine. We just need to get on with it", as illustrated by his proclamation that there will be no border checks post-Brexit and that lorries, just like on the US-Canada border, will not need to be stopped and checked. I have pointed out several times that that is wrong, but I have never had an admission of wrongdoing from the Secretary of State, and that is part of the problem.

The Secretary of State's ideological zeal is at its most visible when it comes to the railways—private sector equals good, nationalisation or public ownership equals bad and inefficient—yet, under the current set-up, state-owned railway companies from all over the world run franchises in the UK. The UK franchise system, based on the premise that public ownership is bad, is subsidising railways across the world. Chiltern Railways, CrossCountry, Northern, and Wales and Borders are run by Arriva, which is owned by Deutsche Bahn. Essex Thameside is run by Trenitalia UK, which is owned by the Italian state railway. Greater Anglia and ScotRail are run by Abellio, which is owned by NedRailways, and Abellio is also involved with the West Midlands franchise, along with the East Japan Railway Company. Southeastern, Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern are run by Govia, which includes Keolis, which is owned by the French state rail operator, SNCF. Keolis is also involved in TransPennine Express and will be part of the re-let Welsh franchise later this year.

Italian, French, German, Dutch, Hong Kong and Japanese state rail companies are running franchises in the UK. When I weigh this up, I start to wonder

whether the UK franchising system should be classed as foreign aid—because that is what it seems like. Money is flowing out of the UK to these other countries. It illustrates perfectly the pig-headed attitude of the Secretary of State and Tory Back Benchers.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that many British firms operate railways in other countries? For example, National Express has just won a contract to run some railways in Germany.

Alan Brown: That misses the point. The German state railway company can bid for its own work in Germany. The whole point is that the UK Government refuse point blank to allow UK companies to bid for the franchises.

As I have said time and again, when it comes to the merits of privatisation and franchising, the Transport Secretary wrongly connects cause and effect. He has always played up the increase in investment in the railways since privatisation, along with the subsequent increase in passenger numbers, as if all that had happened magically just because of the sell-off and break-up of British Rail.

We know that British Rail had been struggling and had poor rolling stock, and that much of it was outdated, but that was because of the constraints imposed on British Rail by the UK Government, who did not allow any borrowing or investment. Once the Major Government had sold it off, the franchising allowed private borrowing to be levered in—borrowing that could be recovered only through fares or a Government subsidy. The fact that the current Secretary still does not acknowledge that shows a lack of understanding or an ideological blind spot. The fact is that the original sell-off was the private finance initiative on tracks, and that remains the case to this day.

Another myth, which we have already heard today, is that somehow the taxpayer pays no money to the franchises. According to the recent library briefing on rail franchises, all but two received Government subsidies in 2016-17, amounting to £2,330 million in that year alone.

A further indication of the failure of the franchise system to which the Secretary of State still adheres is the fact that by 2020, 12 of 16 franchise allocations will be direct awards. Where are the innovation and competition when three quarters of the franchises are direct awards to the companies themselves?

The Secretary of State's blinkered attitude also permeates the failed East Coast franchise. He more or less shrugs his shoulders and says "Stuff happens: some franchises fail." The reality is that private investors and companies either make money or they walk away. It has been argued there has not been a £2 billion bail-out of Virgin Trains East Coast, but the fact is that VTEC has walked away with a £2 billion IOU to the Government in its back pocket. It has not had to pay the money back, so if the Government do not want to call that a bail-out, it must be called a write-off. The Government have not tried to chase up the money, and it has not reached the stage of being a bad debt. The Government have simply let VTEC off straight away. I only wish that the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs would do the same when things go wrong for my constituents. Those bodies are relentless, so why should VTEC walk away owing £2 billion?

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Does he agree with me that franchisees that walk away from a franchise should be banned from bidding for a significant period?

Alan Brown: Yes, I do. The Secretary of State says that there was a parent company guarantee of £165 million for VTEC, which is a lot of money, but if the parent company is picking up other money in franchises, including the direct award of the west coast main line, it is not actually losing that money. It should be penalised properly, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it should not be able to bid for other franchises. Its ability to bid for the east coast main line partnership has still not been ruled out.

The Secretary of State also justifies the predicament of the parent company by saying that it "got its sums wrong." I remind him again that it is his Department that got its sums wrong when it carried out its due diligence and assessment. The Government are lucky that one of the other franchise bidders is not seeking redress from them, because they clearly got it wrong, and got the whole process wrong.

Huw Merriman: Will the hon. Gentleman bear in mind that private rail operators in Britain are paying money into the Exchequer, whereas in France, 20% of the running costs come from the Government? When it comes to sums, which other areas of public spending would he have cut in order to pay for the things that he is talking about?

Alan Brown: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman listened to the point that I made about the subsidy that is paid to the rail franchise companies. It is a circular process, which makes it more complicated and more expensive, because of the number of cost consultants involved, taking money from one direction and paying money in another direction, and then blaming Network Rail. All that money can then circulate, and there are still net subsidies for those companies, although they pay track rental fees.

As I have said before, Richard Branson came out fighting. He blamed Network Rail for the overruns, but we have heard that Network Rail was not really at fault. The Secretary of State should be more robust in attacking VTEC. Letting it walk away owing that money undermines his position.

In previous incarnations, the east coast main line service has proved that public ownership can work. When it was last in public ownership, it paid the track rental fees and made a nominal profit, which went straight to the taxpayer. That model can work, and it should be used again in future. The Secretary of State ought to consider that.

Also on this Transport Secretary's watch has been the Southern rail shambles. He did not do enough to step in. When I highlighted some of Southern's failings on another occasion, he intervened and said that he was not the Transport Secretary who had been responsible for the allocation of the franchise. That completely missed the point: he was simply saying, "It's not my fault, guv."

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alan Brown: I will, briefly, but I am pressed for time.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the situation on Southern and GTR was so long-running that the Secretary of State should step in now, and that there should be not a review but an immediate revocation of the franchise, as happened with Connect Southeastern under Labour?

Alan Brown: I agree that the failed franchise should be addressed and immediate action taken. The Secretary of State has been too slow, and the ongoing review will take too long and kick everything into the long grass.

When Abellio took over the ScotRail franchise, there were teething problems, which made national news. Opposition politicians in Scotland were not slow in calling for the head of Humza Yusaf, the Transport Minister. However, he stepped in and agreed a detailed action plan with the Abellio-ScotRail franchise, which really turned things around. It was direct intervention that made the difference.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): More than 50% of the delays in Scotland are down to Network Rail, which the Secretary of State stubbornly refuses to devolve to Scotland. Does my hon. Friend agree that if he did that, it could make a big difference to rail travel in Scotland immediately?

Alan Brown: It could make a big difference to rail travel in Scotland, and it could also make a Treasury saving. The fact that the Secretary of State continues to refuse to do that defies logic.

We have also seen the railcard fiasco. The railcard has been put on hold because, apparently, no one wants to pay for it. Who would have thought the industry would not want to pay for a gimmick that the Government introduced in the Budget, when they said, "The industry will pay for it"? That is just another failure on the part of this Government.

GTR's chief executive, Charles Horton, has resigned, Mark Carne and Network Rail's chief financial officer are forgoing their bonuses, and we have seen plenty of other Government resignations. It is time for the Transport Secretary to consider his position, rather than awaiting the outcome of a review.

Commenting on delays in the Waverley station refurbishment, Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Tory leader, said:

"This cannot continue for much longer, and it's not good enough for ministers to just shrug their shoulders and say they're doing their best."

Given the delays were the fault of Network Rail, will the Secretary of State do what the Scottish Tory leader thinks is correct, and what we think he should do?

2.38 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): We have been invited by the Opposition to debate a general motion of no confidence in my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary. I have full confidence in my right hon. Friend. He inherited a difficult task from the last Labour Government and the coalition Government. I think

that he fully understands the magnitude of that task and that he is coming up with a number of creative proposals to try to improve the position.

Andy McDonald: It is a disaster.

John Redwood: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that, for 13 years, Labour did not invest in our roads and railways to give us the capacity that we need. I fully accept that during its five years in government, the coalition was unable to invest on the necessary scale because of the financial disaster that it inherited from the outgoing Labour Government. We have had almost 20 years of totally inadequate investment in road and rail capacity. We now have a growing economy. Many more people have jobs and need to get to work, many more children need to get to school, and many more people want to go to the shops or need to go to hospital, so we are simply running out of road and rail capacity. My right hon. Friend is trying to use every method he can legally lay his hands on to address that chronic lack of capacity.

In my constituency, another 12,000 new homes are being built quite rapidly, and the pressures on our infrastructure are enormous. I witnessed some of the difficulties due to rail delays on Thursday and Friday when I was trying to use services in and out of Reading and there were disruptions. My right hon. Friend has asked the extremely well-paid leaders of the railway industry to get a grip on their services and ensure they deliver on the infrastructure available. But he has gone further than that: he has said to the railways that they will need much more capacity in the years ahead to deal with fast-growing places such as Wokingham, and he has therefore said that digital technology will make a big difference. I fully support his strong initiative. The very lengthy and expensive process of creating entirely new railway lines is not a feasible solution across the country, so the way to get more capacity out of our existing railways is to use digital signalling, meaning that instead of being able to run only 20 trains an hour on perfectly good track, we can run 25 or more trains an hour, giving a big boost to capacity for a relatively modest investment.

My right hon. Friend is also right to recognise that he will need private sector as well as public sector investment. I noted that the Scottish National party spokesperson, who clearly did not know the figures, was unable to respond to an intervention about how, in his party's fully nationalised world, it would replace the large sums of capital and the considerable sums of revenue that the private sector tips into the railways as the partnership model develops.

The Labour party is with the SNP on this. It always denies that any fault rests with the nationalised section of the railway, yet in the latest set of problems, particularly in Northern rail, big errors were made by the heavily subsidised nationalised part of the industry. I am very glad that my right hon. Friend says there will be new leadership there, because new leadership is desperately needed to supervise the expenditure of the very substantial sums that this Parliament has voted for that industry and to make sure they are well spent.

Another reason why I have confidence in my right hon. Friend is because he recognises that we need road as well as rail capacity, because the overwhelming majority

of all our constituents' journeys are still undertaken by car or van or bus, and they require road capacity. The most welcome thing he has done so far is to say we need not just to expand the strategic national highways network, which of course we do, but a strategic local network so that we can beef up the A roads. That would mean that we could have more through traffic, meaning that vehicles would be taken away from residential areas and town centres, where we do not want conflict between traffic, pedestrians and cyclists. It would also free some of the blocks on the existing highways and provide better journeys.

I hope that as my right hon. Friend goes about selecting that strategic local route network with councils, he will look favourably on the bids from West Berkshire and Wokingham in my area. We have put a lot of thought into them and wish to make progress, but we will need substantial investment to create better access routes to the main cities and centres of employment, because the existing network is already well over capacity in terms of congestion.

I hope my right hon. Friend will also consider the interface between the rail and road networks. One of the big issues in my area is that we cannot get over the railway line. We rely on level crossings, but their gates are down for a lot of the time at busy periods for the railways, meaning that we get massive onward congestion in the road system. We therefore need money for bridges.

I also hope that work on the strategic local road network will involve looking at junctions. A modest way in which we could get much more capacity out of the current road network would be to improve junctions. It is often a good idea to have roundabouts rather than traffic lights, and another good idea is the better phasing of traffic lights. Traffic lights can be fitted with sensors so that if there is no traffic on an approach road, that road does not get a green phase. Roads should get a green phase only when somebody needs that.

There are many things that can be done. I have every confidence that my right hon. Friend wants to do them, so will he please get on with that, and will Parliament allow him to do so?

2.44 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I wholeheartedly support the motion because somebody has to take responsibility for what is happening to my constituents who use the trains on a daily basis. This Government have history in terms of how they have treated my constituents. They interfered with the Thameslink project when they first got their hands on the Department for Transport, taking the Blackfriars Thameslink trains away from south-east London. They not only took the trains away, but wasted £50 million of public money in order to do so. As a consequence, they shortened the trains going through the centre of London to allow them to go on to the Wimbledon line. I am sure that had nothing to do with the fact that the then trains Minister represented Wimbledon—I make no accusation in that regard whatsoever—but that reduced the capacity of the Thameslink trains going through central London. I will be contacting the National Audit Office to ask whether we are getting value for money out of the Thameslink train service, certainly in south-east London, as a consequence of such decisions on that scheme.

Since 2009, my constituents have been suffering a great deal of disruption as a consequence of the excellent refurbishment of London Bridge. I pay tribute to everyone involved in that refurbishment, but my constituents have had to accept that their services have been cut to certain destinations in central London. There have been no trains to Cannon Street for a number of years, and no trains to Charing Cross as the work switched over on to another set of lines. My constituents were told all the time that, at the end of the process, the network would go back to the original train timetable, meaning that they would have Charing Cross, Cannon Street and Victoria as a choice of destinations.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Does he agree that that is why many commuters, particularly in London and the south, have been so angry? They have had years and years of disruption due to not only repair works, but the disaster of the franchise, and now the railway collapses under their feet. The Government have a responsibility to take action.

Clive Efford: Absolutely; someone has to take responsibility. When my constituents were told they had to suffer this disruption, they accepted that, because a major refurbishment was taking place, but they were told that things would improve when the services were restored. They are now told that they will have fewer central London destinations to choose from because, apparently, it is very difficult to cross trains over on the western side of Lewisham station. We are told that because that creates too much congestion, we have to have a service cut. That is despite the fact that we have just spent £9 billion on this project, with £1 billion of that for the refurbishment of London Bridge. My constituents are incredibly angry.

However, as the project is coming to an end and the services are starting to be reintroduced—except those that are going to be cut, of course, under the new franchise, which is a direct decision of the Secretary of State—the infrastructure around the new project is starting to crumble. On 5 April, there was a broken rail and people were stuck on a train for five hours. The merest incident of severe weather leaves people stranded on trains for hours—on freezing cold trains with no electricity.

The franchise is run right at the cusp, meaning that whenever something goes wrong, it turns into a major incident involving a major delay. There are not enough drivers, there is not enough maintenance, and the infrastructure is crumbling around the new project at London Bridge. However, the Secretary of State allows Govia, which currently runs the franchise, to rebid. He now says that the person at the top of Govia has resigned—Charles Horton has gone—but that the company is apparently good enough to continue running the service. That is unacceptable and someone must accept responsibility.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Since the start of this crisis everybody has tried to pin the blame on someone else. The Secretary of State blamed Northern for not being prepared, and Northern blamed the Department for Transport. Yesterday, in evidence to the Transport Committee, David Brown admitted that Northern was not aware of the extent of the imminent

[Afzal Khan]

crisis until two days before the timetable went live. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State must finally take responsibility for this crisis, ensure that passengers get the compensation they deserve, and allow somebody who can handle the demands of his job to take over?

Clive Efford: I agree with my hon. Friend that the Secretary of State has to take responsibility. That is why I fully support the motion.

The Secretary of State really exposed himself by putting his particularly dogmatic approach to the franchise system ahead of the interests of passengers in a letter that he wrote on 24 April 2013 to the present Foreign Secretary when he was Mayor of London. His letter actually predicted the fact that the Tories were toast and that Labour was going to win the mayoral election. He stated that he did not want to see the London overground services in “the clutches” of a Labour mayor. That had nothing to do with what was in the interests of my constituents or anyone else who used the trains. It was pure political dogma. He was saying, “I don’t like the Labour party, so no matter how much it could improve the service for people who use the trains, we’re not going to let Labour take over the rail service.” So much for an open bidding process to run the best possible service!

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a pattern of behaviour here? Before the 2015 election, when the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) was Lord Chancellor, Labour wrote to say that there should be no more privatisation contracts in the probation service. The right hon. Gentleman ignored that, because he did not want to accept that Labour was right about the disaster that the probation service now is.

Clive Efford: That is absolutely right. This is the first time that the right hon. Gentleman has got caught when everything has come home to roost while he is still in position. Usually he moves on and someone else has to sort out his problems—for example, by allowing prisoners to have books.

My constituents deserve a better service. Their services are being cut and they will have a reduced choice under the new franchise. They do not want Govia to be allowed to continue running the franchise, yet it has still been allowed to bid. They want longer trains, and I have lobbied many times in here to get extra carriages for the franchise but they have disappeared into the system. We still have eight-car trains turning up at peak times and there is not enough space for people to have a comfortable journey into town.

South-east London has been appallingly served by this Secretary of State. There has been a constant litany of letting us down, and the buck has to stop somewhere. He has never stood up to the franchise operators—the train operators—to ensure that we get value for money and the services we are entitled to in south-east London. For him, everything is fine as long as it is privatised. He has never made any attempt to take on the private enterprise that is profiteering at the expense of the people who rely on the trains. In south-east London we

do not have direct access to the London underground, so anyone who wants to commute into London has to use the bus or the rail service. The rail service, as it has been run by this Government, has been appalling and it is getting worse. The buck stops with the Secretary of State, so I fully support the motion.

2.52 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am delighted to be able to speak in the debate this afternoon and to place on record my support for the Secretary of State, who I believe is doing a very good job in delivering what this country needs in incredibly challenging circumstances. That is particularly true from the point of view of the far south-west, where we are seeing record levels of investment in our transport infrastructure. After 13 years in which Cornwall basically got nothing whatsoever from the Labour Government, we are seeing hundreds of millions of pounds being invested in our transport system.

On our roads, we have at last seen the dualling of the A30 across Bodmin moor. I am sure that hon. Members will be delighted to experience that when they come to Cornwall on their holidays, but we have been waiting 20 years for it to be delivered. It has now been delivered under this Government, after Labour did nothing to help us. We are now putting our focus on the next bit of the A30, which will involve dualling the stretch between Chiverton and Carland Cross. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) is working closely with the Secretary of State to ensure that we deliver that as soon as possible.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): May I suggest an additional area of progress that is needed for disabled wheelchair users? The hon. Gentleman might know that many operators require them to give 24 hours’ notice if they want to travel on a train. That is unacceptable. Does he agree that the Secretary of State should work with the train operators to ensure a more can-do attitude, to assist those people who might need to catch a train at the last minute?

Steve Double: I am not aware of the issue that the hon. Lady raises. It has never been raised with me by constituents—[*Interruption.*] I am happy to take it on board and look at it, but that is a new one; it has never been raised by any of my constituents.

In my constituency, the Secretary of State has committed to fund a new link road from St Austell to the A30. That is something that the people of St Austell have been waiting nearly 30 years to see delivered. Under Labour, we had no progress whatsoever on that, but it is now happening under this Secretary of State. We are also seeing progress on the A303, which is being dualled through Wiltshire. That is absolutely vital to the tourism industry in the south-west, and we are seeing real progress on it.

On our railways, we are about to see brand-new rolling stock being rolled out on the Great Western Railway into Cornwall to replace the 40-year-old trains that we currently have to put up with. The new state-of-the-art rolling stock will have far more seats for passengers and a much better driver experience. We have also seen the upgrading of our signalling on the railways through Cornwall. That will increase capacity and the frequency

of the trains. Again, that is the result of more investment that this Government are delivering for transport into Cornwall.

We are also seeing progress on resilience in south Devon. I am sure that all Members will remember the damage that was caused by the weather at Dawlish and Teignmouth in 2014. That situation arose because of the lack of investment over many years, but this Government are investing and building resilience into the rail network throughout Devon. That is something that we desperately need. On aviation, this Government are supporting regional aviation and they have supported my local airport at Newquay with a link to London. They are also backing our bid for further connections into Heathrow in the near future.

So, from a local point of view in Cornwall, this Secretary of State is doing a very good job. He is delivering for the people of Cornwall like no one has ever done before. We need to understand that the current challenges that have provoked this debate have come about as a result of a combination of many complex issues, and to play political games and use this as an opportunity for political opportunism is not what we need right now. We need to resolve the issues, and changing the Secretary of State at this point is not going to help. We need someone in position who can bring us the answers that we need in order to address those issues, so I am happy to say that I will not be supporting the motion today and that the Secretary of State has my full confidence.

2.57 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): One thing that the Secretary of State has managed to do is to unite those on both sides of the Pennines—which is actually quite remarkable—in our view that it is time for him to go. Lancashire and Yorkshire do not normally get on that well, but we are united in this regard. Ministers will know that in recent weeks the great newspapers of the north have been united on their front pages in calling for the Secretary of State to go. ITV has also joined in recently. *The Yorkshire Post* and my own newspaper in Hull, the *Hull Daily Mail*, have made it very clear that we cannot carry on like this and that enough is enough.

We have heard a lot in recent weeks about the timetabling fiasco, particularly in relation to Northern, but as a Member of Parliament for the north, I want to look more broadly at what this Government have said about their commitment to the northern powerhouse and to the connectivity between the eastern and western parts of the north to bring together the great cities of the north. We know that, despite all the words we hear every time a Minister gets up to talk about this, the reality on the ground is very different. We know that the investment going into the north pales in comparison with what is going into London, which gets five times as much. We know that Transport for the North, which Ministers always talk about, is only a consultative body. It does not have statutory powers. It cannot do what Transport for London is able to do to bring in investment.

In recent years, we have also had the fiasco of the electrification of the lines across the Pennines. Hull was actually missed off the first plan that was put forward, and we had to put together our own plan, using private

sector funds, in order to be part of the electrification scheme. That proposal went into the Department for Transport and then, several years later under the current Secretary of State, it was refused.

There is confusion about future electrification across the Pennines. We thought the line was going to be electrified, but the Secretary of State seems to have just discovered bimodal trains, which have been around for quite a long time. In addition, when the House was considering commercial space travel recently, I noted that it seems there will be commercial space flights before the line to Hull gets electrified.

Timetabling has been discussed a lot today, and one of the big issues is that for some strange reason Hull was given slower trains across the Pennines when the new timetable was agreed. The whole idea was that the changes would speed things up and connect cities, but Hull finds itself with trains that take 15 to 20 minutes longer to get across to Manchester. When the new rolling stock comes in as part of the TPE franchise, Hull will get not new trains but refurbished trains. However, Scarborough—I am not casting aspersions on the fact that a previous Rail Minister represents Scarborough—now has new and faster trains across the Pennines. How come the great cities of the north are being treated like that? I remind the Rail Minister of the three things that we would have expected the Secretary of State to support in Hull: a half-hourly express service across the Pennines as part of the northern powerhouse; a direct train to Liverpool; and a direct train to Manchester airport. I found out last week that Llandudno has a direct train to Manchester airport—good on Llandudno—so why does Hull not have one?

We have heard the dogma as to why franchising is continuing, but I want to discuss open-access trains. We had to fight hard to get Hull Trains, an open-access operator, to provide a direct service to London, but it is in meltdown, and I have heard nothing from the Department for Transport or the Secretary of State about that. Our rolling stock constantly breaks down, we do not have enough spare capacity, and drivers are trained only on the class 185s, which are unfit for the route down to London. FirstGroup, the parent company, does not seem to be doing anything about the fact that Hull Trains' reputation, which was good in the city, is taking a nosedive, with people feeling that it is no longer a reliable service, but there has been nothing from the Department on that.

Looking at the franchise that the Department and the Secretary of State are involved with, TransPennine runs the station in Hull and has spent £1.4 million on it, but we are still among the top 10 worst stations in country. It has managed to build some small, smelly toilets to replace the old ones and some new retail units, which have remained empty for weeks. Every morning, I walk through Canary Wharf to get to Westminster, and I see Canary Wharf station, which cost £500 million and has a roof garden. Of course, private money has gone into that project, but we cannot even get a toilet attendant at Hull station. I want to highlight to the Secretary of State and the Minister the stark difference between the north and the south. This is like a "Carry On" film; it is a farce. The Secretary of State must take responsibility. The buck stops with him and he should go.

3.3 pm

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): One thing that is often lost in debates like this is the practical impact of such issues on passengers. I urge the Minister, the Secretary of State and all Members to remember that, yes, this is about getting investment, improving stations and timetables and increasing capacity, but fundamentally the whole point of the system is to make life better for our constituents, particularly those who rely on trains to get to work. Many Members have talked about the difficulties of recent weeks, and the House does not need to hear any more from me about my disappointment in relation to my constituency or those of other right hon. and hon. Members.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): My hon. Friend, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) and I have been working hard with Ministers and with Govia—we are in touch daily—because tens of thousands of our constituents have been massively affected every single day. We are trying to fix things so that our constituents can get to work. Although there are issues with the timetable in our area, things will be dramatically better when it works. The number of seats will be doubled, there will be 50% more trains from my constituency, and a whole variety of new destinations will be provided. When the new timetable is in place, there will be positives, but there are issues now, and they are what we are working daily to resolve.

Bim Afolami: I thank my hon. Friend. One point worth making—one that backs up his intervention—is that a real frustration as a Member of Parliament is knowing the intended improvements over the medium term, but constituents quite rightly not believing that the improvements will happen when the implementation does not work as hoped. It is therefore incumbent on GTR and Network Rail to do their best to get a grip not just on the medium and long terms, but on the emergency timetable.

I want to draw the attention of the House and the Minister to a private Member's Bill that I will shortly introduce relating to enhanced compensation for passengers. I recognise that the Secretary of State has set out a compensation scheme specifically for the disturbances over past weeks, but the compensation in the Bill will be governed by the Government's new rail ombudsman on an ongoing basis, providing automatic compensation for all passengers throughout the country. In addition, it will provide enhanced, more generous compensation for passengers throughout the country. Critically, it will ensure not just that passengers get a percentage of a single ticket for a train that is cancelled or delayed, but that we move towards a system with service levels and a contract between the operator and the passenger. Then, if that service level is not maintained, the passenger will receive compensation. I would like the Minister and the Secretary of State to consider that direction.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I thank the hon. Gentleman for flagging up his Bill and welcome what he describes. Will he confirm whether the compensation for the current timetable problems should be based on the new timetable that was expected to be introduced, not the reduced timetable, and therefore be much larger? Does he agree that there is a strong case

for making train companies and Network Rail liable for consequential losses associated with train delays, not just the ticket cost?

Bim Afolami: On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, that would depend on when the Bill could make progress and whether it would take effect in time. It is difficult to understand how the proposed compensation regime would interact with the special compensation regime relating to the implementation of the new timetable. However, on the right hon. Gentleman's broader point about consequential loss, he will appreciate that that is hard to prove. I remember from my days as a corporate lawyer that consequential loss in contracts is one of the toughest things to prove. I am not saying that he is incorrect, but it would merit further consultation and I am happy to sit down and discuss the matter with him. If we can come to an agreement, hopefully the Liberal Democrats will support my private Member's Bill.

A point that is often made to me is that many commuters do not have a good enough choice. On some lines, the operator is the only game in town, and where that happens, it is incumbent on the operator to do a significantly better job at getting on top of problems when they arise. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon) made the point that the Secretary of State may need additional powers at times of crisis to direct what needs to happen at certain stations, and the House should consider that. I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has said to me, both privately and in this House, that he is committed to improving the situation at Hitchin and Harpenden stations once we have got past the current difficulties—*[Interruption.]* I can see the Rail Minister nodding in approval, which is always good. My constituents—I was nervous about this before I came to speak this afternoon—are not particularly interested in rhetoric; they are interested in making sure these changes are introduced in the right way to provide real practical improvements to them and their lives. That is what I, as the local Member of Parliament and with the Government, will hopefully be providing.

3.10 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in this important debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) for moving the motion.

Although the Secretary of State is no longer in his place, I thank him for meeting me last week to talk in detail about the reasons for the timetabling meltdown in Batley and Spen. I am grateful for his reassurance that, over time, things will settle down.

Last Friday morning, I spent time outside Batley railway station to speak to commuters about their experience of commuting and to hear how things are, we hope, getting better. Sadly, that was not the feedback I got. I was startled by how chaotic and unreliable the service between Leeds, Huddersfield and Manchester still is.

I heard from Mandy that her regular journey from Batley to Leeds, during the timetable chaos and beyond, is "the worst commuting experience I have ever had." She went on to say that "to say there is only standing room is an understatement. Passengers are crammed into a limited number of carriages like sardines."

I spoke to Dean, who uses trains every day. He said that travelling by train often adds two hours to his day due to delays, with “extra hours away from home on top of a long working day.” He went on to say that “the situation is threatening the livelihoods of many.” Dean wanted me to ask directly whether, if he were to lose his job due to mismanagement of the railways, the Minister and the Government would pay his mortgage and support his family.

I also met Rachael, who was forced to spend her journey standing in the toilet with six other commuters, as there was no space anywhere else. She told me that, as late as this week, her regular service left people on the platform, without opening its doors, as it was too full by the time it arrived in Batley. Seventy people were left waiting over 70 minutes for the next train.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as our constituents are paying some of the highest prices in Europe for train tickets, the minimum they should expect is for trains to run on time and to be modern and comfortable and for them not to be packed in like sardines? If the train companies are unable to do that, they should have their franchises taken off them and be brought back under public ownership.

Tracy Brabin: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and I could not agree more. Given the cost of tickets, people should not have to stand on a daily basis. Beyond Batley to Leeds, the timetable is erratic and in chaos, and it still has not settled down.

I spoke to Alison, who told me how concerned she is about health and safety. Crowds of passengers are jostling and pushing to get on already overcrowded and delayed trains.

This is just a snapshot of what is happening twice a day, every day, at most stations across the north. My constituents still see no positive change in their commute, even after reassurances from the Secretary of State. What is the Minister doing to ensure that my constituents can travel to work and back without having to factor in delays and frustrations, which are adding to their stress?

People deserve a decent, reliable rail network, and, in all honesty, they deserve better leadership from the Secretary of State. If he cannot sort it, maybe it is time for him to hand over the responsibility to someone who can.

3.14 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am terribly sorry for stepping out of the Chamber earlier than I should have done. It should be me who steps down. I am grateful for being able to say a few words this afternoon, not least because I am a member of the Transport Committee.

I wanted to speak on this subject because I think there has been too much chopping and changing in the entire industry over the years. I recognise what the Opposition motion aims to deliver, but I ask them whether any more changes in leadership would actually deliver the stability that is required. I am not trying to make an argument that might play well; I absolutely mean it.

I have worked with the chief executive of GTR, Charles Horton, over a number of years, and I have tried to work between him and the leader of the RMT, Mick Cash, with whom I have a good working relationship, to try to find a way through the Southern industrial dispute. Charles Horton has now stepped down, which I know many people will celebrate, but, frankly, this is a man with years and years of rail experience who truly cares about putting things right. I am sorry because, frankly, I would rather see people stay in post to turn things around. If there are areas of responsibility, fine, allocate them, but then put that person under the spotlight to deliver the change that makes things better. I absolutely believe the same goes for the Government.

When the Government change position, it sometimes feels as though we have government by six-month fixed-term contracts; there is not enough stability and tenure in post. I support the Secretary of State. He has come to the Transport Committee and has been incredibly open and direct about, for example, where he sees the franchise system is not working and about the need for change.

Now that the Secretary of State has the opportunity to put new franchise agreements in place, it seems right that he should inject some of his ideas for change into those agreements. It is not as though he has constantly said that everything works well. He has admitted there are particular challenges.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that one way forward might be to follow the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami) to increase the availability of compensation to passengers who have been badly treated?

Huw Merriman: I certainly do, not least because my Automatic Travel Compensation Bill is awaiting Second Reading. The Bill is all about automatic and automated compensation, on which I have met the Rail Minister. It is fair to say that I have not quite persuaded him of the Bill's merits, but it would place a duty on train companies that currently receive money from Network Rail where there have been delays. Only a third of passengers claim for such delays, so I contend that extra money is left with the train operators. My Bill would require the train operators to invest that money in technology so that my right hon. Friend and I could both tap in and tap out, which would tell us whether we had been delayed by more than 15 or 30 minutes, and if we had been, we would automatically be credited with the compensation we were due. That would be a good step forward, because passengers find it too complex and difficult to claim. Therefore, they do not claim, and as a result, they feel raw about the service. The Government could do more for passengers by making it easier to claim compensation, and perhaps passengers would then give us more support on some of the other changes we are trying to put through. That is a rather lengthy response, but I agree with my right hon. Friend. I hope that my Bill's Second Reading will yield some success. If my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami) has a similar proposal, perhaps we could merge the two.

On the rail timetabling issue, my constituency has had an additional service—a fourth service each hour—in an incredibly congested network. I take my hat off to

[Huw Merriman]

GTR and my rail user group, which came up with an ingenious solution to deliver the extra service without any new rolling stock. The timetable just changed when trains go back and forth between Ashford and Brighton, which has worked incredibly well.

I understand that we, as MPs, are less likely to hear about things that have worked well. Quite rightly, we hear about the challenges where things have not worked. I use the trains every day to come into work, and today I had the opportunity to talk to one of the conductors on my line, a guy called Giles. I was supposed to be reading through the Transport Committee's draft report on rail infrastructure, but I put it down to have a chat with the conductor. We chatted for the entire journey about some of the issues he has, and his points were well raised. He is aware that, as technology advances, the workforce will need to embrace it, too. His concern on the role of the guard, conductor or on-board supervisor, as these people tend to be called, is that there will be fewer of them. That is a valid concern, because most passengers on trains want to see a second member of staff on board.

My point is that, where the system is inflexible, if the second member of staff is unable to join the train for any reason, that train cannot roll. I was a Southern season ticket holder for 10 years and we had one train every hour, so when that train could not go because the conductor was not able to board, there was a two-hour delay, which was no good for anybody. It certainly was no good for tackling congestion or for those who had mobility issues in the station. So I like the flexibility that has now been introduced in Southern whereby in all but exceptional circumstances there must be a second member of staff on board. Where such circumstances do apply—and this cannot be where Southern has not recruited enough conductors—the train can still roll, so passengers can get home. Of course that type of situation has existed on Southeastern for years and it also exists on 30% of the rail network, where the driver operates the doors.

There is another point to make about incidents that have taken place, including one in Liverpool. Where the driver and the conductor are performing different roles, tragedies can occur. A young lady died on the tracks and the coroner's inquest made the point that if the control mechanism is taken by one person, we are less likely to see that eventuality occur. I often hear safety used as the reason why this is an issue. I was asked by the rail unions to see whether a safety report could be created. We got the rail regulator to deliver that, but it was then ignored, so I feel that all sides need to work a little more together.

3.21 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It will not be a surprise to the Secretary of State or the Minister to see me standing up to speak in this important debate, as my office has been in daily contact with theirs over the past few weeks. I can tell them that things are no better in Bedford. Until 20 May, passengers in Bedford had two choices: they could travel on Thameslink trains, which were slow but made more stops, or they could travel in and out of London on a fast East Midlands Trains service. The Department stopped those fast trains last

month. We were told in December that there was no choice but to do that. We were promised that it was only for two years and that we would have two fast Thameslink trains an hour and thousands more seats instead, but that was not true. What we have seen since 20 May has been absolute chaos. People are paying to stay in hotels all week, and some are driving into the city. People have run out of childcare options and their bosses have lost patience. These people are tired, angry and desperate. They have been crammed like sardines into the few trains that do run, and family life has been completely disrupted.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend's constituents' experience absolutely reflects those of my constituents. The two train stations in my constituency are the last two before the main Leeds city station. By the time the two-carriage trains come, they are full and my constituents cannot get on them. When they do, we have seen cases where people have fainted or been unable to breathe. Does he agree that we need to do something now, as the lack of investment and action is dreadful?

Mohammad Yasin: I agree with what my hon. Friend says, because I am a commuter and I see the trouble at Bedford station every day. Almost every hour, a train is either delayed or cancelled. This Government need to take control and do something about this urgently.

Two weeks ago, in this Chamber, I asked the Secretary of State to reinstate EMT peak rail services. His response was that that would be the logical solution to the problem, yet two weeks later those trains are still speeding through Bedford half empty and not stopping. On Friday, he finally wrote to me to tell me that he cannot make this happen after all, as, apparently, it will make some trains 13 minutes later further up the track. Tell that to my constituents who have to wait an hour or more for a train and do not see their children before they go to bed. Tell them that a 13-minute delay on a journey to Sheffield is a good enough reason for these services not to be reinstated. EMT says that these services are already overcrowded. In his letter on Friday, the managing director of EMT said that "there are few, if any seats available".

Yet EMT's own guide to seat availability says that all but one of the peak-time trains travelling between Wellingborough and St Pancras have seating available. Most are running at 75% capacity or less; we can all see the empty seats, but we just cannot get on those trains.

I have no idea why there is such an absence of will to sort this problem, but this is a mess, and it is clear now that there was never any intention of bringing inter-city fast trains back after two years either, because if they cannot make it happen now, when Thameslink is not operating a full service, they are not going to be able to make it happen when it eventually is. All we have heard are excuses. The truth is the industry needs to work together to resolve this quickly. The Secretary of State should have a grip on this weeks ago—months ago, in fact. I warned him and the Minister many times that this timetable will not work for Bedford, but they completely ignored that and carried on regardless. He and his Department have spent a good proportion of the past few weeks putting together the invitation to tender for the new east midlands franchise. Is this farce not proof

enough for him that rail franchising does not work? My constituents need solutions and they need them urgently. They need solutions before things get even worse. If the Secretary of State cannot fix this, he should resign and give the job to someone who can.

3.27 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and to support the motion standing in the names of my Front-Bench colleagues. I also wish to thank members of the Transport Committee for their informed contributions to the debate, and I am delighted that the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) is a supporter of keeping the guards on the trains—well done on that. [*Interruption.*] Perhaps it is qualified support.

As a member of the Transport Committee and a regular rail user, I have been following the recent regression of the rail service, particularly in my region, with great concern. The catastrophic May timetable changes seem to have been completely avoidable. The Secretary of State ignored warnings and failed to delay or phase in the changes.

Yesterday, my Transport Committee colleagues and I spent three hours asking questions of and taking evidence from representatives from Northern, GTR and Network Rail. I was quite interested to hear the Secretary of State say in response to a comment made by the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), that he made the decision to proceed with the changes in July 2017, because my understanding from what the witnesses said yesterday is that concerns were expressed at a meeting involving stakeholders and Network Rail in January, some six months before the ultimate decision was made. There was ample opportunity for the Secretary of State and his advisers in the Department to intervene and identify some mitigating actions, which could have included either delaying the implementation or phasing it in.

Andy McDonald: Given that GTR is a concession and is paid a management fee, could my hon. Friend cast some light on whether the revenue due to the DFT was a factor in the delay in the implementation of the decision?

Grahame Morris: My hon. Friend raises a good question. I asked the GTR witnesses yesterday whether revenue was a material factor, and their response was that all the revenue is collected directly. They intimated that there were no revenue implications, although I am rather sceptical that ultimately revenue may well have been a factor in the decision about whether to phase or to delay the implementation of the new timetable. Perhaps the Committee can pursue further whether that was the case.

We have heard from Opposition and Government Members about the impact of the terrible delays. In my area, at the worst times up to 43% of Northern trains have been cancelled or delayed each day. From 4 June, Northern cancelled 165 trains a day, including all services to the Lake district, as we have heard. Since 20 May, 11% of Northern trains have been delayed or cancelled each day.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend accept that although this issue is concentrated in the north, the east and London, it is a national problem? Great Western has been going through its own dramatic problems, with a huge number of cancellations, driver shortages and all the other problems that have been mentioned. It is a national problem.

Grahame Morris: I am grateful for that thoughtful intervention, and my hon. Friend makes a good point. However, although there are national issues with the training of drivers and ensuring that they have the appropriate skillset, industry stakeholders pointed out to the Department and, presumably, the Secretary of State that it would normally take 40 weeks to prepare, identify training needs and ensure that drivers were in place, but in this case only 16 weeks were allocated and, if my memory of yesterday's evidence serves me right, it was not until around two days before implementation, when they were drawing up the driver rosters, that they discovered that they had the wrong skill mix and that the drivers were in the wrong places to operate the new timetable. So although my hon. Friend makes a good point, Ministers and the Secretary of State must ultimately bear responsibility for the decisions that were made.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): It is quite simple in the industry: although experienced, train drivers need training on new routes and on the use of different rolling stock. Without that training, they cannot go into service.

Grahame Morris: Absolutely; that is a key point. I am kind of long in the tooth now, but I remember the dreadful train accident at Ladbrooke Grove, where 31 people were killed and 500 injured; a dear friend of mine was killed in the Southall train disaster, in which seven were killed and more than 140 were injured; and I remember another accident at Clapham Junction. What with the complexity of the new signalling systems at places like London Bridge, with large numbers of tracks, it is safety-critical that the drivers are fully aware of which signals actually apply to them. It is a mistake for the Secretary of State to imply that ASLEF, representing the train drivers, should somehow make a concession on the training to which its members are subjected. When I get on a train, I want to be absolutely certain that it is completely safe and that the drivers are familiar with the track and the signalling system. I also want to know that there is a guard on the train, so that if anything happens—if anyone is attacked or taken ill—or there is a disabled or blind person or a woman with children travelling, the guard will be able to assist. That is reasonable in such circumstances.

I agree with the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle about the GTR chief executive, Charles Horton, who seemed like a thoroughly decent man. He said that he was deeply sorry for the timetable disruptions. It is a bit unfair that he seems to be carrying the can, when I suspect the blame should be apportioned further up the food chain. The witnesses yesterday were well schooled in collective responsibility, but ultimately the buck must stop with the Secretary of State. It is not good enough just to keep saying sorry.

Huw Merriman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Grahame Morris: I am sorry; I am running very short of time.

[Grahame Morris]

It is another failure on the Secretary of State's watch. We have fundamental problems with integration, lack of planning and decision making. The franchising model is broken. It is time for a new approach and a new driver at the head of the Department for Transport.

3.35 pm

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The motion on the Order Paper is

"That this House has no confidence in the Secretary of State" and we have already heard from the fourth and final Government Back Bencher who has come along to speak in support of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has not stayed in the Chamber to listen to the speeches today, but if I were giving advice to him or to Conservative Back Benchers, I would suggest that they go out and buy a plaque that says, "The buck stops here" and attach it to his desk, because that is what the debate is all about. It is about the public wanting to elect politicians to run a decent railway system. I congratulate my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State on standing up and confidently saying that he wants to be a Secretary of State who runs the railways and is held accountable.

The meltdown caused by the introduction of the new rail timetable in May is just the latest in a chain of crises on our railways. We have an over-complex and fractured rail system. It has too many operators and a complex web of contractors and sub-contractors. This patchwork of competing interests militates against effective planning and delivery of the railway, making Britain's rail system one of the most expensive and now worst run in Europe. Since 2010, fares have risen three times faster than wages, and in January we had the highest fare increases for five years. That is not to mention the more than £5 billion of public money used to subsidise the private rail network every year.

It seems to me that incompetent rail companies have become too big to fail in the eyes of this Government. The rewards are privatised, but the risks are dumped on passengers and taxpayers, who always end up footing the bill. The public are tired of paying the price for a broken privatised and franchised model. Is that any surprise? What are they getting in return? Higher fares for a worse service; botched timetables and thousands of cancellations; and a policy of de-staffing the railways in the interests of profit, regardless of the consequences for staff and the travelling public.

One of the first campaigns I backed following my election in June last year, was the RMT's campaign to keep the guard on the train, after Merseyrail announced that it was planning to axe all 207 guards from the service when the new fleet arrives in 2020. My constituents welcome the introduction of new and modern trains—long overdue and for which the unions campaigned—but they also value the safety and security of a guard on the train.

Private rail companies are making huge profits from the travelling public, and it is completely wrong that we are presented with false choices between embracing new technology and protecting secure jobs and public safety. It is nonsense. The campaign has enjoyed the overwhelming support of the public, despite strikes, and I am glad that

Merseyrail has recognised that strength of feeling and that talks at ACAS are now taking place. Both the Scottish and Welsh Governments have agreed that there will be no extension of driver-only operation on services that they are responsible for, and I hope that Merseyrail will follow suit so that passengers in my constituency are afforded the same safety standards as are enjoyed elsewhere.

However, the RMT fears that since the Secretary of State was appointed he has been blocking any similar deals in an effort to "take on" the union. These fears were again confirmed when the Public Accounts Committee recently produced a report on franchising that concluded that the blame for the protracted Southern driver-only operation dispute lay squarely at the door of the Government for not engaging properly with the trade unions.

The franchising system fails to allow for industrial relations at all. Train operating companies have little interest beyond the terms of their franchise agreements, and changes are routinely forced through without any serious consultation. The introduction of the May 2018 timetable required changes on a huge scale. Change requires the co-operation, engagement and good will of the workforce, which has been undermined constantly by the rail companies and by the Government's handling of the DOO dispute.

The rail industry lacks a clear chain of command and clear lines of accountability, so it is easy to blame others. Ultimately, though, the buck stops with the Transport Secretary. Not only has he failed on a managerial level; he has defended, at every turn, the systemic failure of rail privatisation. My advice to him is simple. First, take responsibility. Secondly, listen to the public, who by a vast majority support a return to public ownership and public control of our railways.

3.40 pm

Mr Gavin Shaker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): When Parliament returned on 4 June after the recess, I challenged the Secretary of State, telling him that he was in great trouble over this situation, not least because it would run on for months and months. There has been little to cause me to reassess those comments in the past three or four weeks. For me and my constituents in Luton who travel by train regularly, it is clear that this chaos is not going anywhere quickly, but we are yet to establish who is responsible for the chaos not only when the changes were implemented, but as it is sorted out. I am afraid that the attitude of the Secretary of State has led us to today's position, whereby we will shortly vote on whether we have confidence in him.

We are now close to the sixth week of chaos on GTR, with the admission that it is going to drag on for months. The Secretary of State said today that GTR will develop a temporary timetable in time for the summer holidays, but that is not good enough. It is a complete abdication of responsibility. GTR's chief executive has resigned. Network Rail's chief executive officer and chief financial officer have turned down their bonuses. But there has been no acceptance of responsibility from the one person we ask to sort things out when they go wrong.

Let me be clear about my view on the franchise and who is responsible. I am open-minded on rail. I believe that a transformation project as vast as the Thameslink

programme, with £7 billion of taxpayer-invested money, should always have been operated and developed under the direct ownership and accountability of Government Ministers. That is why I said that it should not have been issued on a franchise or management contract back in 2014. It is equally clear that, given its record of failure, GTR cannot be in charge of the major changes that are coming in December 2018. GTR should not be responsible for this franchise when we get to December.

It is clear that franchising is broken. The series of statements, speeches and debates in the past year clearly demonstrate that there is very little good news about the franchising system on our railway, and that is because of one simple reason: there is no clear accountability. Let us be clear: the current system and the decisions that had already been taken to award this franchise could have worked with creative, intelligent leadership from the Secretary of State. That was absent. He lacks the intellectual curiosity to participate and, as I will explain, he had every opportunity to win us round.

I want to talk about two things: structures and the decisions that have been made. Let us look at the institutions that the Secretary of State has chucked under the bus during this crisis; he cited Network Rail, GTR as the operator and the industry readiness board. Network Rail is an arm's-length public body with one member—the Secretary of State. He is the shareholder and he appoints the chief executive. He cannot walk away from the crossover between his Department and Network Rail.

Secondly, the GTR arrangements are not a classic franchise. GTR gives all the ticket revenue to the DFT—about £12 billion over the seven planned years of the franchise. In return, it gets back £9 billion to run the railway. The DFT takes all the revenue risk. When the railway fails to perform, it is a black hole for taxpayers. Crucially, the DFT sets the specification for the timetable, which I will say a few more words about.

Lastly, there is the rail industry readiness board, chaired by Chris Gibb, who was appointed by the Secretary of State. The representatives on the board include Network Rail's south-east route, Network Rail's LNER route, Network Rail's Anglia route, Network Rail's Thameslink project team, the Network Rail system, and, crucially, the DFT. In the Secretary of State's account, we are asked to believe that all these organisations assured him that everything would be fine, that there was no contradictory advice from the people within those organisations, and that three weeks before, the green light had been given to go. I find that very difficult to square with the reality.

I turn to the decisions that have been made and the opportunities to avoid this crisis. First, the initial timetable was set in the franchise ITT—invitation to tender—in 2014. We have no idea whether an operator can achieve 24 trains per hour through the Thameslink core, because the DFT assessed the four bidders and discovered that no one could design such a timetable. Even so, it gave this timetable planning task to GTR. Secondly, on rolling stock, the DFT ignored the warnings on financing trains, leading to a two-year delay in securing financing, instead of standing behind the decision. That resulted in late delivery, late trains, and a lack of training for drivers.

Thirdly, on the reliance on rest-day working, the Secretary of State is directly responsible for pouring fuel on the flames of the disputes when we could have

moved to more modern working arrangements on the railway. Lastly, on the late timetable approach, the decision to downgrade the aspirations in July 2017 was made directly by him. There is no evidence that he did anything but stay asleep at the wheel when it came to seeing this through.

It is clear that the Secretary of State's defence does not wash. Either someone is accountable for the railways or they are not. We need more than a ghost in the graveyard of the DFT.

3.46 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State can be in no doubt from the contributions across the House today that the rail chaos is having a devastating impact on people's lives and jobs and on the economy.

The meltdown in the timetable and the revised timetable is causing serious pain to commuters. We have heard from hon. Members north, south, east and west. The whole nation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) said, is facing the pain. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) talked about how promised improvements were yet to be delivered, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford), who highlighted that the £9 billion spent has led to more chaos. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) reminded us that the northern press has united in its call for the Secretary of State to resign.

My hon. Friends the Members for Easington (Grahame Morris), for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) and for Luton South (Mr Shuker) have all highlighted forensically how the buck stops with the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spennings (Tracy Brabin) shared heartrending stories of her constituents sardined into trains and having their safety put at risk due to overcrowding.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The *Western Mail* has said that the Severn tunnel will now be shut for three weeks as the rail electrification kit rusts before it has even been used. Does my hon. Friend agree that if true, this is shocking, and that there need to be further checks to ensure that this important infrastructure project will be fit for purpose?

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend makes the point so well—more chaos on our railways.

In the past 24 hours, hundreds of passengers have shared their experiences with me, including a relationship breaking down, trains so packed that people are standing for hours while paying more for their tickets, cancellations of trains for hours on end, and people leaving home at 5.30 in the morning to face a four or five-hour commute. One person had no choice but to walk home for four hours in the rain in the middle of their exams. There is lots of stress about getting to work on time and getting home to pick up the children, and lots of stress for those sitting exams and simply not knowing if they will get there on time.

A mother had to sing "Happy Birthday" to her child from Waterloo station because she would not make it home for their birthday.

[*Rachael Maskell*]

We all know that the problem is much deeper rooted. Were Robert Adley alive today, he would have seen himself truly vindicated for his call to halt the Railways Act 1993, for he foresaw how fragmentation would eventually create complete chaos across the railways, as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), the shadow Transport Secretary, set out. Mr Adley dubbed that Bill the then Tory Government's "poll tax on wheels". The fate of the poll tax is a stark reminder of what happens when Governments continue to blame everyone but themselves and fail to listen to the public. The public now overwhelmingly call for the renationalisation of the railways, which Labour will deliver.

The failure of one part of the Secretary of State's Department to talk to the other, with franchises promising one thing despite Network Rail not having the capacity to deliver on his promises, demonstrates that the buck stops with no one but the Secretary of State. No Government can sleepwalk their way through a crisis, and this weak and floundering Government most certainly cannot. To ignore the public, to ignore the industry and now to ignore Members of this House shows utter contempt, for which the public will not be forgiving—not least when people have lost their jobs, been unable to sit vital exams, or missed precious moments of family life. Passengers are exhausted from working very long days due to their uncertain commutes. Passengers are unable to plan. Passengers are unable to have any form of life as their short journeys have been replaced by waits at stations that are 10 times the length of their journeys.

It is clear that commuters are not just frustrated with this totally avoidable Government failure, but with their own MPs for not securing change at the top. Today, we all have the opportunity to make the necessary change. If it is not addressed today, it most certainly will be at the ballot box, and MPs who were silent today when they had the chance to act on behalf of their constituents will find that those constituents will vote accordingly come the next general election.

The problem is that all this rail chaos, which was well known in advance by the Secretary of State, was allowed to happen on his watch because he put his ideology of private interests ahead of public service, because he failed to co-ordinate franchises across the divides in his Department, because he did not intervene and stop the timetable changes when he had the chance to do so, and because he evidently has put himself and his career above passengers and theirs. He was warned time and again but failed to act.

This afternoon's vote is simply about confidence. Voting against the motion or even sitting on your hands would not only highlight how hon. Members are complicit in the chaos that has ensued over the last few weeks, but show support for how the Secretary of State conducted his Department, his actions in the months preceding the introduction of the new timetable, and the way in which he has let the public down consistently over the last 30 days. Constituents who were late to work again this morning will want to know how their MP voted today—did they place their confidence in the Secretary of State, despite all that has happened, or were they willing to stand up for their constituents and vote for this motion? When constituents miss their family meal and time with their children tonight, will they look up to their MP for

taking action through the first step of removing the heart of the problem—the Secretary of State—or will they remember that their MP, when given the opportunity to do something, sidestepped the issue?

Perhaps the Prime Minister will show her full support for the Secretary of State this afternoon by neither voting for the motion nor taking any action to replace the person at the heart of the crisis, thus tying her own leadership to this national public disaster, or perhaps she will start to distance herself from all that has happened and find someone who can respond to this crisis. Surely she cannot continue to back a Secretary of State who has not only failed rail passengers but will continue to preside over the chaos that, as we have heard, he will be unable to resolve for weeks if not months. Anyone who understands the need to make a fresh start after a public disaster knows that they need to deal with those responsible, which in this case means pulling Northern and GTR back into public ownership with immediate effect. The public will not forget how the avoidable rail chaos was woefully responded to.

There is one more issue that I want to raise: public safety. Even as we speak, public safety is being put at risk. We heard the Secretary of State take a swipe at the unions—he always does—but they represent the very people who work relentlessly across the network and, in particular, have kept passengers safe over the past few weeks. They have taken action today because they fear for public safety as guards are removed from trains. They are right to do so. If anything makes the case for guards on trains, it is the experiences of the last month. The guards are the very people who help the public in times of need. Labour will never put ideology above safety, let alone public service.

There is another public service issue on which the Secretary of State is failing. In this chaos, I have heard reports of stations crammed with passengers and trains crammed with people. Those people are fortunate to get on board—disabled people have been left stranded at stations because they cannot push their way on to trains. This is a seriously unsafe situation. The country must remember above all that national disasters have occurred when people have been squeezed into spaces that are too tight to hold them. When they are not just standing for hours on their commute but physically restrained on trains, it is easy to imagine how someone could fall on the tracks or fall ill on a train, especially in this heat. If nothing more, all hon. and right hon. Members should vote with Labour to put down a clear marker that they urge the Government to address this very serious issue. The choice today is to stand up for passengers, or to stand up for the Secretary of State and his failure on the railways. I trust that I will see hon. Members from both sides of the House in the Aye Lobby shortly.

3.56 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): The disruption faced by passengers over the past three weeks on parts of the GTR and Northern franchises is unacceptable. That was reflected in the powerful contributions we heard from my right hon. Friends the Members for Wokingham (John Redwood) and for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), and my hon. Friends the Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami),

and for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). It was also reflected by Opposition Members, including the hon. Members for Batley and Spennings (Tracy Brabin), for Luton South (Mr Shuker) and for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin), who spoke powerfully about the difficult travelling conditions that their constituents have faced in recent weeks.

I want to reassure colleagues on both sides of the House that the Department's overriding priority is to restore the reliability of service across the network. The Secretary of State has left the rail industry under no illusion that it must urgently improve its operational response including, if necessary, by changing top management, as is now happening at GTR. He has commissioned an independent inquiry by Stephen Glaister of the Office of Rail and Road, the independent regulator, to examine why we are in this situation and to reduce the chances of it ever happening again.

Turning to the performance on Northern, passengers continue to experience disruption on some parts of the network. There is a long way to go until performance is where it needs to be, but we are beginning to turn the corner. The introduction of a temporary timetable by Northern on 4 June will help to rebuild passengers' trust. The first signs are promising, as industry figures show that over the first two weeks of the reduced timetable, 80% of trains arrived on time, and 4% of trains were cancelled or arrived significantly late. In the previous fortnight, 66% of trains arrived on time and an average of 12% of trains were cancelled or were significantly late. That improvement must continue over the coming weeks.

Ian Mearns: That all sounds very nice—a real improvement. However, according to the BBC this morning—this is certainly the evidence that we have all heard from our constituents—11,000 trains on the Northern rail network have been either cancelled or delayed for more than 30 minutes. That is tens of thousands of constituents who have been really badly put out, often left without a route to work, school, college or training.

Joseph Johnson: The cancellation of services is now progressively more and more planned by Northern as it seeks to stabilise the timetable and to ensure that the travelling public—the constituents of hon. Members on both sides of the House—can plan their journeys with greater assurance. This improvement, and the stabilisation and increased reliability, must continue over coming weeks. Northern plans to run the timetable until the end of July, when it will review progress and take stock. At that point, it will hope significantly to increase the number of timetabled services while ensuring continued improvements in stability.

The crux of the performance issues, as hon. Members have recognised, is the availability of drivers with the correct training. I am happy to say that, as a result of Northern's hard work with ASLEF on rest day working, they were able to announce last week that they had reached an agreement for the immediate introduction of a new rest day working agreement. This will allow for more training and a better service for passengers sooner.

Let me turn to GTR's performance. GTR is also working to increase the predictability and reliability of journeys on its network. It is working actively to reduce on-the-day cancellations, and is now updating its timetables on a Friday evening for the following week, enabling

passengers to plan ahead more effectively. Alternative travel arrangements are in place. For example, passengers on the Brighton main line can have their Thameslink tickets accepted on Gatwick Express, and next month GTR will introduce a full temporary timetable across its network as the next step to improve reliability and performance for passengers.

It is worth noting that some parts of the GTR network, including all of Southern, are now experiencing more train services and better performance than ever before. However, I do not consider the service to be anywhere near approaching one that I or passengers would find acceptable and, as the Secretary of State said, we are examining why GTR is taking longer than Northern to improve services. The review that has been commissioned will look at whether GTR has met and is continuing to meet its contractual obligations in the planning and delivery of the May timetable.

Mr Shuker: Does the Minister believe that GTR should be operating the franchise at the next major timetable change in December 2018?

Joseph Johnson: That question will be addressed in the review, which is looking carefully at GTR's performance and whether it has breached any of its contractual franchise commitments. That is not something that we can pre-empt. We are looking at it carefully in the review and, as the Secretary of State said in his opening remarks, nothing is off the table.

Clive Efford: The Minister says that, but why is Govia being allowed to re-bid for franchises or to bid for others?

Joseph Johnson: As the hon. Gentleman will understand, it is important that the Department acts consistently and treats train operating companies consistently across the industry. The Department is carefully reviewing whether GTR has breached any of its franchise commitments, and we will do that thoroughly, following all correct due processes, as everybody has a right to expect us to.

Let me turn to compensation. We are clear that passengers on the lines that have been severely affected by these issues will receive additional compensation. The Department is working closely with Network Rail, train operators and stakeholders to introduce a special compensation scheme as soon as possible. We have already recommended to the board of Transport for the North that passengers who buy weekly, monthly or annual tickets on affected Northern and TPE routes should be eligible to claim up to four weeks' compensation. As part of the scheme, the industry will be providing financial support to Transport for the North to deal with other costs that have arisen from the disruption.

I expect the board of TFN to confirm the final details of the scheme by its next meeting on 28 June and for payments to begin for Northern in early July. The Secretary of State has also announced a compensation package for passengers who travel on affected Thameslink and Great Northern routes. As he said, it will follow the special compensation scheme for Northern and TPE. Finally, we are looking at options to further support the northern economy and expect Northern to fund a marketing campaign encouraging travel to affected areas by train, including the Lakes.

[Joseph Johnson]

I hope that this has reassured right hon. and hon. Members of the seriousness with which the Government are taking the disruption facing passengers. We are taking action to resolve the problems as quickly as possible, to compensate passengers appropriately, and to learn the lessons that will prevent this happening again in the future.

Question put.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am about to close the doors, as I normally do after eight minutes, but I understand that there is a problem with the lifts in Norman Shaw. I am acutely aware that some colleagues are coming by wheelchair and other, more difficult means. I am therefore purposely delaying the closing of the doors, not for those who are already here, who I trust will vote as swiftly as possible, but for colleagues who are struggling, especially in wheelchairs. It is hard to believe that a lift was full and a colleague in a wheelchair could not get into it.

I am looking hopefully to see if we have succeeded—we have almost succeeded, but not quite. I could describe the wheelchair—[*Interruption.*] Thank you, Mr Wishart. It is a long time since I sparred with you. I could do with a point of order right now, which of course I cannot take in the middle of a Division. You do not normally get a filibuster from the Chair on the matter of closing the doors, but I am now satisfied that all colleagues who had difficulty in getting here because of a lift problem have had a chance to vote. It is hard to believe that other colleagues did not vacate the lift and allow the lady in the wheelchair to go in first, but that is up to them. Lock the doors!

The House having divided: Ayes 285, Noes 305.

Division No. 189]

[4.5 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas

Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela

Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
Davey, rh Sir Edward
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica

Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
O'Mara, Jared
Onasanya, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Peacock, Stephanie
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth

Smith, Angela
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmar, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Tami, Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeff Smith and
Vicky Foxcroft

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bottomley, Sir Peter

Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishty, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin

Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke

Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul

Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew

Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mims Davies and
Kelly Tolhurst

Question accordingly negatived.

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill: Committee Stage

4.20 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 48 and the practice of the House relating to the authorisation of charges upon the public revenue, the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill Committee has leave to consider the Clauses of the Bill and any new Clauses that may be proposed to it; but the Bill may not be reported from the Committee before this House has passed a Money Resolution, for which the Queen's Recommendation has been signified, in relation to the Bill.

Here we are again, debating the same issue: by all accounts, according to custom and practice and convention in Standing Orders, the position is, quite simply, that a money resolution follows a private Member's Bill, but my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) has still not been given a money resolution for his Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill 2017-19. However, the motion makes a slightly different proposal, so I hope that the House can agree to it. It proposes that we can debate the Bill before the Report stage, at which point it will be given its money resolution.

Let me deal first with the Bill itself, and then with some of the objections that have been expressed by the Leader of the House and others. I hope that by the end of my speech, I shall have persuaded Members that the motion should be passed. The Bill fixes the size of Parliament at 650 MPs, it fixes the allocation in Northern Ireland at 18, and it keeps the areas as allocated in 2011. It allows for a 7.5% variation in the electorate. A report must be submitted before 1 October 2020 and every 10 years. It uses the register of electors from 2017, or the most up to date. How can anyone who believes in democracy not support that?

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Perhaps I can give the hon. Lady a very good reason. She may be familiar with the e-mail that Members received on 14 June from the Boundary Commission for England, in which it confirms that it will report to the Leader of the House on or before 5 September, so that the Leader will have an opportunity to lay the orders in the House during that month. It plans to report in just four full sitting weeks' time. I say to the hon. Lady: what is the hurry?

Valerie Vaz: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his speech. I will address that point later in my own speech.

The Bill had the support of the House, so it proceeded to its next stage; but then it was thwarted—not once, not twice, not thrice, but six times. The first issue raised was that of costs. The Leader of the House said that it would cost £12 million, but, as I have said before, the instructions to the Boundary Commission were flawed. It was instructed to make the electorate numbers fit the figure of 600, without being given any explanation or evidence for the use of that figure. To save costs, the Bill proposes that the commission should report every 10 years, but the Government want to scrub that and require it to report every five years.

I want to know why the Government consider 600 to be an appropriate figure on the basis of an old electoral register.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Obviously Ministers are drawn from Parliament. Does my hon. Friend agree that if the number of MPs is reduced but the number of Ministers is not, a considerable amount of power will shift from Parliament to Government? If the Government's proposal were even-handed, the number of Ministers would be reduced so that power would not be transferred from Parliament to the Government.

Valerie Vaz: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. I will be drawing on it. Let me add, however, that as early as tomorrow we will see the effect of an overbearing Executive, and will see why it is so important for Members to be able to hold the Government to account.

If the Bill were allowed a Committee stage as a result of the motion, the debate on my hon. Friend's Bill could explore the reasons for it. The Government could table new clauses and vote against clauses in the Bill, as many Conservative Members have suggested. Amendments could be tabled, too. This motion would allow that to take place so that hon. Members on both sides would be aware of why the Government object.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) must be psychic as I am now going to touch on the point he made. I have asked this previously, but will the Leader of the House confirm in relation to the payroll vote whether there will be a reduction in the number of Ministers and what costs will be saved by a reduction in the payroll vote? There is more work to be done as we leave the European Union and post-Brexit both for Parliament and for the Executive, but this means that the Executive will dominate Parliament, and if costs were an issue, ministerial numbers would also be reduced. However, the Government are incurring more costs in Parliament. What are the costs of the peers? In the last seven years, 260 have been appointed.

My second point—[*Interruption.*] I do not know if that was an intervention. The Leader of the House refers to things being done on a case-by-case basis. What is that, and since when do the Government decide which Bills ought to be progressed? She seems to have come up with a new case-by-case basis Standing Order. I have checked the latest edition of the Blue Book—May 2018—and there is no entry for “case-by-case basis.” This means that the Government are twisting convention by saying they will decide which Bills are worthy of a money resolution. All Bills should be treated fairly, which is the basis of the convention.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Why is there this sudden interest in money resolutions from the Labour party? I cannot find a single instance of the Labour party in government looking to change the rules surrounding money resolutions, so is it simply for political expedience that this motion has been introduced today?

Valerie Vaz: The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous lawyer so he will know we are talking about the present. We are talking about money resolutions and about other Bills that are also stacked up, and it is a convention of the House, here and now, that the Government should provide money resolutions.

How can the Government justify picking and choosing which Bill gets a money resolution? This is not an elected dictatorship. It appears that the Government are acting in the same way here, by thwarting the will of

the House, as in the abusive process that we saw last Friday on the upskirting Bill. I hope I can help: it is a bit like England finishing its qualifying round having won its league and FIFA saying, “I'm sorry, but we won't allow you to go through; we're going to deal with this on a case-by-case basis.” That would be an outrage: if England are at the top of the league, England should go through.

This is a serious issue because it goes to the very heart of our democracy. Some 2.1 million people have been left off the register and have not been included in the Boundary Commission's dealings. This is an especially serious issue as the boundary changes appear to favour one party. We must remember that the current Government are a minority Government governing only with a confidence and supply agreement.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): The Government have wilfully plucked a figure out of the air, have manipulated the electoral register and taken 2.5 million people off it. The constituencies have no basis, so the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan)—[*Interruption.*] If the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), Conservative Members wants to make a contribution, she can do so when I am not on my feet.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot interrupt himself when making an intervention while referring to a sedentary comment from the Conservative Benches, but I will allow him to finish his perfectly reasonable intervention.

Mr Mahmood: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; I have gained further knowledge.

My hon. Friend's Bill tries to address this issue. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) agree that this is not about gerrymandering or taking powers away from this House, but about restoring those powers?

Valerie Vaz: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and he is right. This is about democracy, about using the old register and about fettering the Boundary Commission.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does the hon. Lady not agree that the Boundary Commission is an independent body that is completely separate from any political considerations? It is not run by politicians. It is carrying out a thorough review, on the instructions of this House, in order to do the right thing for our constituents and for taxpayers. How can she suggest that there is any political consideration involved in the body's work?

Valerie Vaz: No one is talking about political interference. We are talking about the initial instructions that were given to the Boundary Commission, which were based on flawed instructions.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): While we are still on the issue of the size of constituencies, does my hon. Friend recognise that there are a number of

[Ms Karen Buck]

constituencies—mostly, though not entirely, inner-city ones—in which the population is far greater than the registered population? I declare an interest here, because my own constituency has a population twice the size of the registered population. This is only going to get worse with the arbitrary reduction to 600 Members, further reducing the connection between Members of Parliament and those they serve.

Valerie Vaz: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We deal with cases that go beyond those on the electoral register. For example, we deal with whole families, including children, following the cutbacks in advice services. We still have to deal with those cases.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend also agree that there are variations in the propensity of certain groups in the population to appear on the electoral register? For example, there is an 80% propensity for older women from the home counties to be on the register, compared with only a 20% likelihood for young black men in inner cities to be on it.

Valerie Vaz: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Further to those last two points, would my hon. Friend acknowledge that the amount of constituency work required from a Member often bears no relation to the number of people on the electoral register? I dare say that about a third of the people who come to my surgeries for advice and support are not registered to vote.

Valerie Vaz: I absolutely agree. All hon. Members know that we deal with such issues and cases, and that we cannot turn people away, because we are often the last resort.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I believe that the hon. Lady is complaining that reducing the number of Members of Parliament will create an unacceptable workload, but when I look at the statistics, I see that British MPs each represent about 90,000 people, whereas Spanish MPs represent about 133,000, German MPs represent 116,000 and French and Dutch MPs represent 114,000. Why should we not be able to do at least as good a job as the MPs in other leading European democracies?

Valerie Vaz: I am not saying that this is just about an increase in workload. I am saying that the Boundary Commission's ability to look at everything should be unfettered.

My third point is that this is not another argument about not receiving an email. In the last debate on this matter, the Leader of the House said that an email had not been received and that this was just a matter for the Westminster bubble. This is not just about responsive democracy. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton is proactive, and he saw a sense of unfairness. As with any Bill, we try to do something when we see something that is unfair or when we want to close a loophole. That was exactly the reason for my hon. Friend's Bill. Yes, some constituencies should be

equalised—some rural constituencies might not have the same numbers as inner-city ones—but that must involve a proper analysis, and the Boundary Commission's ability to use the numbers in local areas in a way that fits must be unfettered.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I am listening with interest to what the hon. Lady is saying. Will she clarify something for me? Under the current instructions to the Boundary Commission and the principal legislation, a new review is carried out every five years and the number of seats allocated to each constituent part of the United Kingdom is adjusted according to the number of people on the register. Is it the purpose of her hon. Friend's Bill to fix in perpetuity—or until such time as the legislation may be amended—the number of seats for Northern Ireland at 18?

Valerie Vaz: Under the Bill, the number would be fixed at 18. The seats would be allocated on the basis of the 2011 instructions, but nothing would be in perpetuity. No Parliament can bind another Parliament, so that could all change. The instructions could change.

Fourthly, what about the procedures of the House? I am sure you will agree that they are important, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Procedure Committee recommended in its 2013-14 report on private Members' Bills

“that the Government be required to make a written Ministerial statement on the reasons for the delay if a money or ways and means resolution, where required, has not been put to the House within three weeks of a bill being given a second reading.”

The Government response stated:

“It is the responsibility of the Member in charge of the bill to make a request to Government to table any money or ways and means motions that may be required. It is the practice of the Government to accede to such requests... The Committee has not produced any clear evidence to suggest that current arrangements are not working or that a new rule is needed.”

However, the Government have not acceded to the request for a money resolution, and the current arrangements are clearly now not working. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton has been thwarted six times. Will the Leader of the House join me in writing to the Procedure Committee to inform it that the Government are not following the procedure laid down by the Committee and rules of the House?

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): I was elected on a manifesto that called for a reduction in the number of MPs to 600. How can I look my constituents in the eye and spend the equivalent of 600 nurses' salaries on something for which they did not vote?

Valerie Vaz: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I will write to him and place in the Library the list of things that the Government have reneged on since their manifesto.

More importantly, this matter is pressing because hon. Members will have received an email from the Boundary Commission, which says that it wants to report before the conference recess, so this is not about the Westminster bubble. Hon. Members were elected to be the guardians of democracy. Now more than ever, we need to stand as beacons of fairness, upholding democratic values and doing what is right. I hope that hon. Members will support the motion.

4.36 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): I welcome the chance to respond, yet again, on the subject of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill. The House will be aware that I have already responded to both an urgent question and an emergency debate about the Government's approach to the private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), in addition to responding to questions at business questions. Nevertheless, I am more than happy to outline, once again, our approach to private Members' Bills, and to the hon. Gentleman's Bill in particular, before turning to the specific terms of the motion.

The boundary commissions began the 2018 parliamentary boundary review in 2016 and are due to report the final recommendations to the Government later this year—within just a few sitting weeks. This Government have made a commitment to continue with that boundary review, which was voted for by this House, and it would be inappropriate to proceed with the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill at this time by providing it with a money resolution. The Government have committed to keeping this private Member's Bill under review, but it is right that we allow the boundary commissions to report their recommendations before carefully considering how to proceed.

As I said in the emergency debate on 21 May, progressing with this particular PMB would place a potential financial burden of £8 million on taxpayers. Given that Parliament—this House—has already committed to the 2018 boundary review, it would not be responsible for the Government to support such extra cost to the taxpayer at this point.

Mr Khalid Mahmood: To follow the Leader of the House's reasoning about what this Bill will cost the public purse, what other Bills is she considering dropping to save money?

Andrea Leadsom: I will repeat it if the hon. Gentleman did not hear it, but I just carefully explained that the Government bring forward money resolutions for private Members' Bill on a case-by-case basis. It is precisely because this House voted for the 2018 boundary review that we must wait until that work is finished before deciding how to progress with this private Member's Bill.

With one review under way, plus an incomplete review from a previous Parliament, the review proposed by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton would be the third review of boundaries and would push the total cost of reviewing boundaries towards £18 million. The Opposition may not have a problem with unnecessarily spending £18 million of taxpayers' money, but the Government certainly do. That is our position, and we look forward to seeing the boundary commissions' recommendations in the coming months.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The Leader of the House seems to be saying that one of the reasons why the Government will not table a money resolution is the amount of money the Bill would cost. I do not know whether she is inadvertently misleading the House, but the reality is that tabling a money resolution does not mean the law will pass. What then happens is that the Bill can be considered in Committee, on Report and by their lordships. The issue here is that the Government are running scared because they know a majority of

Members of this House support the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), so they are trying to kill it in Committee. This is not about money; it is about parliamentary procedure being subverted.

Andrea Leadsom: I will come on to procedure, but the hon. Gentleman simply is not right. The Government are not killing this private Member's Bill; we are saying that, until the boundary commissions have completed their work, which will be in a matter of a few weeks—the House voted for the review to take place—the Government will not take further action on a money resolution.

For the clarification of all hon. Members, this is not without precedent. During the 2014-15 Session, the coalition Government did not table money resolutions on two private Members' Bills. At the time, the then Leader of the House said:

“it is unusual but not unprecedented for the Government not to move a money resolution. There have been previous instances of that under Governments of different parties.”—[*Official Report*, 30 October 2014; Vol. 587, c. 417.]

Mr Harper: On procedure, there is a wider point than just the money. The boundary commissions, as part of their review, have carried out a very democratic process. They have listened to thousands of responses, not just from Members of this House and political parties but from thousands of members of the public. Would it not be an abuse just to throw all that away and start all over again?

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is exactly right. That is the whole point. The Government are saying we will not table a money resolution until we have had a chance to consider the review, which is currently under way and due to report soon. However, this debate is not about the merits of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, and it is not even about the merits of the Government tabling a money resolution on the Bill. This debate is about whether a Committee may have leave to disregard the rules and conventions of this House. This motion seeks to undermine a fundamental principle that is a cornerstone of our constitutional settlement.

The financial initiative of the Crown is a long-standing constitutional principle that allows the Government of the day to initiate financial resolutions. Chapter 32 of “*Erskine May*” explains:

“It was a central factor in the historical development of parliamentary influence and power that the Sovereign was obliged to obtain the consent of Parliament...to the levying of taxes to meet the expenditure of the State. But the role of Parliament in respect of...expenditure and taxation has never been one of initiation... The development of responsible government and the assumption by the Government of the day of the traditional role and powers of the Crown in relation to public finance have not altered this basic constitutional principle”.

Either the Government of the day have the right to initiate financial proceedings or they do not. The Crown initiative is a binary issue, and this motion seeks to overturn it.

Nigel Dodds: There have been references to the boundary commission review as though there is just one review, but of course there are reviews in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. On a point of process,

[Nigel Dodds]

does the Leader of the House intend to table separate resolutions on each of those Boundary Commission reviews, or will they be taken together?

Andrea Leadsom: That is to be confirmed, but the right hon. Gentleman is correct that the boundary commissions of all four nations will be reporting imminently. It has been a huge and very expensive undertaking that absolutely upholds the principles of democracy.

Let us get back to what is under discussion today. The motion seeks to erode the fundamental principle that it is the Crown, through its Ministers, that has the exclusive right of demanding money and of defining the purposes for which that money is required. The core responsibility of the Government is accountability to the taxpayer. The Opposition may not understand that, but we on this side of the House most certainly do.

The motion would allow the Bill Committee to consider the substantive clauses of the Bill, amend the Bill and potentially introduce new material into the Bill. The conventions of the House are very clearly set out in “Erskine May”, which states that

“any financial provisions which”—

a Bill—

“may contain must be authorised by a resolution of the House, i.e. a money resolution, before they can be considered by the committee on the bill.”

The financial provisions contained in a Bill—in this case the money clause, which is clause 5—are there on First Reading to indicate that the Crown initiative is needed. The existence of these money clauses, or in other cases the existence of italicised provisions, is the practice by which it is indicated that Second Reading is contingent on a financial recommendation from the Government. This financial recommendation must come before the House or its Committees can proceed with detailed consideration of the Bill’s contents.

If a Committee is allowed to consider the substance of the Bill in the absence of a money resolution, the Crown, through its Ministers, loses its centuries-old right to initiate and define the purposes for which that money is required; putting the power of the Executive into the hands of the legislature.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House is trying to blow this issue out of proportion slightly by making it sound as though we are trying to overturn a years-old, decades-old, centuries-old convention. Is this motion not merely asking to allow a Committee to consider a Bill? If the money resolution did not come by the end of it, the Bill would not be passed. We are seeking to allow Parliament to get on with it. Is the point of an unwritten constitution not to allow flexibility and to understand that in times of need we can change procedure?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman walked in late and did not hear the start of the debate. If he read his own motion, he would realise that it seeks to overturn not years or decades but centuries of a very clear convention: that the Government initiate financial resolutions. It could not be clearer, and this Opposition motion, for purely party political reasons, is utterly irresponsible. May I ask: where are the previous Cabinet

members from the Opposition? Clearly, they are not in this place because they, having been in government, recognise the constitutional settlement, where Governments decide on the money and Parliament consents to it and scrutinises it.

As I was saying, if a Committee is allowed to consider the substance of the Bill in the absence of a money resolution, the Crown, through its Ministers, loses its centuries-old right to initiate and define the purposes for which that money is required, putting the power of the Executive into the hands of the legislature. This questions the role of the Executive, whichever party is in power. The fundamentals of having a Government—of having any Government—are that they are there to take decisions and to be accountable for those decisions. Taxpayers want and require the Government to be accountable for the way in which public money is spent. That is what it means to be a responsible Government.

Rachel Maclean: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is about a fundamental principle upon which our general elections are run: we set out our manifesto and the public vote on how they want their money spent? The attempt to change that is a fundamental undermining of our democracy in this country.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is exactly right on that. This Government are responsible for initiating financial transaction resolutions, and the Opposition and Parliament are responsible for scrutinising, amending and reviewing; they are not responsible for initiating resolutions. It is disappointing to waste parliamentary time today explaining this point to an Opposition who really should know better and who, in their actions today, are showing no signs that they would act as a responsible Government.

The motion would set a dangerous precedent, but there would also be further potential consequences of allowing it to pass. First, the scope of any money resolution is one of the factors in determining whether amendments are within the scope of a Bill. The change in practice that the motion seeks to introduce would remove that restriction on what can be considered and voted on in Committee. The Committee would be pointlessly wandering through the Bill, agreeing to clauses—with or without amendments—that may not actually be permitted by any money resolution that may or may not be forthcoming in future. Why should the House foot the bill for whatever the Committee decides?

The House must first provide financial authorisation, if and when the Government are ready to initiate it, and the Committee must then work to agree or amend the Bill in the light of that authorisation. The Committee should not be asking for the House’s retrospective forgiveness; it has to wait for the House’s permission for its money resolution. Ultimately, I would be very concerned with the situation in which the approval of this motion would leave the Bill Committee itself. It would make discussions in Committee theoretical at best, and at worst it would make the whole process farcical.

Secondly, it is worth remembering that once the Committee has been through the Bill, agreeing its provisions clause by clause, the Committee cannot refine those decisions. The motion would not empower the Committee, as the Opposition might seek to argue; it would actually disempower the Committee, giving it a false sense of

making progress while in fact damaging its ability to amend the Bill in the light of any developing circumstances that may in future give rise to a money resolution. I question whether all the members of the Bill Committee are fully aware of the terrible damage that the Opposition Front-Bench team are trying to impose on them.

This House runs on its conventions and on the assurance that centuries-old practice and procedure is there to protect the rights of all parliamentarians. The Government absolutely respect the right of the House to establish its own practices and procedures, but that respect must work both ways. A responsible Parliament must also respect the constitutional settlement, the relationship between Government and Parliament and the conventions that underpin the Crown initiative. By undermining all that for party political reasons by tabling this motion, the Opposition show how poorly they understand what it means to be responsible parliamentarians, let alone a responsible Government.

Financial responsibility is at the core of responsible government. Taxpayers have the right to see their Government held to account for how public money is handled, and it is Parliament's legitimate right to hold the Government to account on that. However, Parliament—in the form of the Opposition or Back Benchers—does not have the right to undermine the Crown initiative on financial matters. Parliament does not have the right to propose taxation; that is a matter for the Government. Nor does Parliament have the right to bypass the need for the Government initiation of tax measures through, for example, Ways and Means resolutions. Parliament does not have the right to impose public spending; it is the Crown's exclusive right, through Ministers, to propose increases in expenditure in a fiscally responsible way for which the Government are then held to account.

I am gravely concerned about the motion's longer-term unintended consequences for the separation of powers between the Government and Parliament. Once the lines are blurred on decision making, the role of Parliament in scrutinising and holding the Government to account is put into jeopardy. Ultimately, a line does have to be drawn, and it is drawn under the historic practices of this House, under the constitutional rights of the Crown and under the long-established relationship between Government and Parliament. The line is there whether Opposition Members like it or not.

The Government are elected by the people, and the Government alone have the constitutional right and duty to initiate financial proceedings that are in the taxpayers' interests, because it is the Government who are accountable to the taxpayer for their decisions and for defining the use of public money. Today, the Opposition are doing nothing more than abusing long-standing constitutional principles and seeking to manipulate the procedures of the House for political ends. At last year's general election, the people of this great country had the opportunity to give the Leader of the Opposition the chance to be in charge of public spending. They did not take that opportunity. This Government will not allow the Opposition to take that opportunity by stealth, which is what is being attempted through this motion.

4.54 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Here we go again. Yet another debate on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill and yet another attempt from the Government to thwart it and stop any sort of

progress. I listened carefully to the speech of the Leader of the House, and it was extraordinary. It was a sort of "Know your place, Parliament" assertion of the rights of the Crown, making the distinction somehow that this Government are not going to be accountable to Parliament in whatever this Parliament chooses to do. I have never heard a speech quite like it, and I hope that when the Leader of the House has a look at it in *Hansard* she will reflect on what she said. I have never known the House to be lectured in such a way about its rights and responsibilities. We are Members of Parliament, elected directly by our constituents, and we come here to make sure that their interest is properly and effectively represented. To be told just to know our place in the House and allow the Government to do whatever they want was quite disgraceful. I hope that the Leader of the House reflects on what she said today.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that providing a money resolution does not spend the money? All it does is allow Members to discuss the Bill line by line. That is what the Government are not allowing.

Pete Wishart: Absolutely. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) made that point to the Leader of the House. The money resolution does not commit the Government to anything in money terms. It allows the Bill to progress. At any point during that process the Government can come along with new clauses, and might have legitimate grounds for making sure that the Bill is delayed. I accept and respect that, but let the Bill progress for goodness' sake.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The Leader of the House said that the Opposition were given a chance last year to become the Government and did not get it from the electorate, but she should be reminded that she did not get it either. She mentioned the Crown and ancient conventions a lot in her speech. She should remember what happened to a king who defied Parliament.

Pete Wishart: That is a salutary lesson from the hon. Gentleman. He knows and respects his history, and knows exactly what is being debated here and the impact that that type of speech has.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): This is not an area where I have expertise, but my understanding was that the money resolution enabled money to be spent in preparation for the Bill becoming law. So there is a financial implication of passing a money resolution, even if the Bill has not proceeded to Third Reading and Royal Assent.

Pete Wishart: The right hon. Gentleman is right that he is not an expert on this particular issue; he has just demonstrated that by what he said. There is no obligation on the Government to commit money in a money resolution. A money resolution would allow the Committee stage of the Bill to be given the authority that the Leader of the House suggests this motion would not allow. I looked today at some of the proceedings of the Committee. It is like "Alice in Wonderland" meets "Groundhog Day", without any progress. The Committee seems to come together and adjourn; as quickly as it sits

[Pete Wishart]

to consider some of the issues, proceedings are abandoned because there is nothing for the Committee to do. What an absolute and utter waste of time.

The key point is not Parliament's responsibilities and the distinction between Government's and Parliament's roles in the House. The key issue is that the private Member's Bills system is broken. It may be broken beyond repair. This is the fifth Parliament I have been involved in, and I have never known a Parliament to obsess so constantly and continually about private Members' Bills. Usually they go through without any real issue or difficulty. The Leader of the House mentioned a couple of Bills under the coalition Government for which money resolutions were withheld. In the periphery of my memory, I remember those Bills, but that was about the first time in my 17 years in this place that the Government withheld money resolutions. We are entering a new sort of territory with this Government weapon to stop the progress of Bills that they do not particularly like. The House should consider deeply the increasing use of this method as a blocking tactic for private Members' Bills before we continue down such an avenue.

Mr Harper: I think I can help the hon. Gentleman a little by explaining why there have been several such examples. It is because private Members' Bills have started to be used inappropriately by people trying to deliver significant constitutional change, which should properly be done in detail on the Floor of the House. Perhaps that is why the Government have reflected carefully on whether they should allow money resolutions at every stage.

Pete Wishart: I have a reasonably neat solution in response to the right hon. Gentleman. If the Government do not like private Members' Bills—if they object to them on constitutional grounds or for whatever reason—they should get up, tell the House and put their case on the Floor of the House. If the House agrees with the Government and finds particular issues and difficulties with a private Member's Bill, the House can vote against it. If the House says, "No, we do not accept the Government's arguments", Members can vote for the Bill so that it passes. That is called democracy. The right hon. Gentleman used to believe in that principle. It is certainly something that I still value.

Siobhain McDonagh: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) is underestimating the power of private Members' Bills historically in this House? They have paved the way for very big social change. For example, the Abortion Act 1967 and the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 by Lord Morris—both very powerful pieces of legislation—came via private Members' Bills. They have always had a huge and significant impact, so what the right hon. Gentleman says is just nonsense.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to remind us of some of the really important private Members' Bills in the history of the House. She will remember her colleague, Tom Clarke, who got two private Members' Bills through Parliament: one on international development and another on disability. We owe a great deal of credit to Tom Clarke for what he

did to ensure that those Bills were brought before Parliament. The Governments of the day were not prepared to consider those Bills, but Members of Parliament thought they were important enough to bring to the House, and to spend time and effort on getting them through. There are also really important private Members' Bills in this Session. My hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) is not here, but his Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill is really important. Again, that Bill has been stalled by this Government refusing to provide a money resolution.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): The hon. Gentleman accused the Government of having an aversion to private Members' Bills, but he also said that he has been here for five Parliaments. In fact, 22 private Members' Bills were passed in the 2005 Parliament and 31 were passed in the 2010 Parliament. If we include the 2015 and 2017 Parliaments together, more than double the number of private Members' Bills have been passed than in 2005. That is hardly an aversion to private Members' Bills.

Pete Wishart: I do not think that I ever made the charge that this Government have an aversion to private Members' Bills. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to be accusatory, I will accuse the Government of blocking Bills that they do not like. That is what we are getting to here. There are lots of Government-sponsored private Members' Bills, a couple of which I have personally sponsored and that I want to see progress, so I am not saying that they have an aversion to them. I think that they value them as much as possible, but the system is broken just now. The current way in which we do this business is not satisfactory, and every Member of this House should be concerned about that.

David Linden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the reasons that the Government, under the current regime, are putting through so many private Members' Bills is because they skip over the ones that they do not like. In the case of the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), his Bill was 13th in the queue. The Government just decided that they did not like it, so they went to the Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Bill of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), which was 92nd in the queue. We cannot have a situation whereby the Government decide just to skip over Bills. The Leader of the House spoke about overriding centuries-old tradition, but the centuries-old tradition is that we go to the next available Bill, so it is the Government who are riding roughshod over the procedures of the House.

Pete Wishart: That is right. I am trying to be helpful to the House, as always. You know me, Madam Deputy Speaker; if I can think of a way in which to bring the House together so that we can try to make satisfactory process, I will offer it to the House. I see it as part of my job, obligation and responsibility as a Member of Parliament to see whether we can broker a solution. I suggest to the Leader of the House that the system is not working. I think that she and I would agree on that. She can nod her head if she wants.

Andrea Leadsom indicated dissent.

Pete Wishart: She is not nodding her head; she thinks that it is working satisfactorily. Okay, I may be on my own. In my view, and probably in that of most Members on the Opposition Benches, something is wrong. Something is not working with the system of dealing with private Members' Bills. There is real disappointment and anger in this House about how all this is working out. This is the third time we have debated it, as the Leader of the House said, and it is not getting any better—if anything, it is getting worse. After her lecture to the House today, it feels a lot worse to Opposition Members.

If money resolutions are a sticking point, how about we try to design some sort of solution? I have tried to suggest this notion to Conservative Members: if they do not like something, they should come here on a Friday to oppose it and get their way; and if they do not get their way, they should accept the role of the House. We are going to have to try to find a way round this. We cannot continually come back to the point where Members secure support for their Bill from this House, believe that they are making progress with it, and then are ultimately blocked by a Government who do not like it and so are not prepared to give it a money resolution.

I do not know how we might do this, but may I suggest to the Leader of the House that we try to get a cross-party solution? I know that it has been suggested that the matter should be put to the Procedure Committee. That has happened twice in my time in this House. We have had the Procedure Committee consider private Members' Bills, and maybe it should do so again. How about if all the parties got together and tried to see what we could do to ensure that we get round some of these very tricky issues? The current situation is not good enough.

I was out in my constituency campaigning over the weekend. Our constituents look at these sorts of issues and get more and more concerned. We have a particular issue in Scotland. People in Scotland are furious about the disrespect that this Government have shown to our nation in taking about 15 minutes to turn the devolution settlement on its head. However, they are also seeing some of these issues about private Members' Bill going through. *[Interruption.]* I know that Conservative Members do not like it, but this perception is building up. I saw over the weekend that there is bewilderment more than hostility. What is the House of Commons doing? Why cannot we properly debate issues that are really important? Why cannot we consider private Members' Bills?

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What my constituents and most people in Scotland, I think, got frustrated with and annoyed by was the pantomime performance we saw last week of SNP Members storming out of the House, not representing the interests of their constituents or of Scotland. The Leader of the House spoke very well about the importance of the Government keeping control of financial resolutions. I would be interested to know if the right hon. Gentleman would advocate the same proposal for the Scottish Parliament with regard to how the Scottish Government manage similar matters.

Pete Wishart: First of all, I am not a right hon. Member. For some reason, Scottish National party Members are not made Privy Counsellors, regardless of how long we have served in this House. I thank the hon. Gentleman for the promotion, but I have never actually secured that position.

I wish that the hon. Gentleman had been on the streets in Perth, as I was, on Saturday. He would have seen the deep frustration and anger that there was with this House after the massive disrespect demonstrated to our Parliament—the Scottish Parliament—which secured 15 minutes of debate before its devolution settlement was turned on its head. There is a growing frustration with this House as more and more people, particularly in Scotland, are seeing—because they like watching us speak—how this House is treated. There is real bewilderment about what is going on.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I hesitate to move the hon. Gentleman off one of his favourite topics, but does he agree that there is another fundamental point that is being missed? The current boundary review is inaccurate because its formulations do not include the many extra voters who have gone on to the electoral rolls since the Boundary Commission did its basic analysis. This needs to be done again, and that would strengthen our democracy.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I know that a lot of people want to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I will try to make a bit of progress if I could be allowed to do so.

I hear what the Government are saying. Of course, there is the news that we will have the report of the Boundary Commission before we come back in September. However, my feeling—perhaps it is just me again—is that what the House decided on the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) trumps what the Boundary Commission is about to deliver, because it was a democratic decision of the House that favoured his Bill and wanted to see it progress. My understanding is that that should come first. I think that outcomes decided on the Floor of the House—

Mr Harper *rose*—

Pete Wishart: I will not give way. I have given way to the right hon. Gentleman before, and I know that Madam Deputy Speaker wants me to rush.

I believe that outcomes decided on the Floor of the House take precedence over anything that the Boundary Commission review will conclude. As hon. Members have said, there is not a majority for what the Boundary Commission is proposing. At some point, that will have to be tested in the House. The House will either have to agree that we should cut the number of our constituencies to 600 or say to the Government that we need 650 Members.

There are good reasons why the number should stay at 650, and they have been outlined. We will lose our 73 Members of the European Parliament in March next year, so all their responsibilities and duties will have to be prosecuted by Members of this Parliament. The point was also made about the relative imbalance that there would be between Members of Parliament and the Executive if there were 600 MPs, with more Ministers per Member of Parliament. That is a real point. Then there is the absurd circus down the corridor—the House of Lords. We are talking about reducing the size of Parliament, while there is one new Member of the House of Lords after one another. We have to be very careful about all those things.

The key point that the Leader of the House made today was that this is all about precedent, because it is in “*Erskine May*” and the Standing Orders of the House

[Pete Wishart]

that the Government have the right to introduce money resolutions. Let us take that out of their hands. Another solution that the Leader of the House might want to consider is that once a private Member's Bill passes its Second Reading, a money resolution should be put forthwith to the House. If the Government disagree with the money resolution, they should put forward their reservation at that point, which would allow the House to make a decision. What is the point of this private Member's Bill purgatory that the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton is experiencing? It is not fair to him, for a start. Why can we not do that at the outset of the process?

Lastly, this is about the democratic outcomes of the House and how we do our business. We dispense with that at our peril. We have to look carefully at how we are organised in this House and how it is being observed. Private Members' Bills are a feature of this House that our constituents like. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) mentioned the big, important pieces of legislation that have been passed as private Members' Bills. We mess with them at our peril. They are broken just now; they are not working. Let us see if we can work together to find a solution that will allow us to continue to enjoy bringing pieces of legislation to the House as ordinary Members and make sure that they are not obstructed by Government. For goodness' sake, surely we can achieve that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. This is a well-subscribed debate. If colleagues stick to a maximum of nine minutes, we should be able to get everybody in. I call Mark Harper.

5.12 pm

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will be mindful of your injunction and try hard to stick to it.

I am going to do something radical—I will try to stick to the motion—but first, since this is a debate, I want to deal with a number of points that Members have made. I should declare my interest as a member of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Public Bill Committee. We spend very pleasant Wednesday mornings in Committee Room 11, where civilised discussions take place between the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), myself and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for the Scottish National party. We gambol around the issues as far as we are able to, staying in order of the motion to adjourn. It is certainly not purgatory.

I will repeat, albeit at greater length, what I said in an intervention on the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz). We have received a message from the Boundary Commission for England. I received it as a Member representing an English seat, and I presume that the other boundary commissions will write to Members who represent other parts of the United Kingdom, if they have not already, to confirm the process that they have undertaken. The Boundary Commission for England carried out a consultation that was widely publicised. It received

more than 35,000 individual responses, which represents a great deal of interest from members of the public. The commission has confirmed that it will report its recommendations to the Leader of the House on or shortly before 5 September to give her the opportunity to lay the report in Parliament before the conference recess. I raise that point because it sits squarely with the timing issue.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), but I have to confess that even when I was the Minister taking through the Bill that became the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, I was not overruled by constituents grabbing me to discuss the finer details of that legislation. Clearly his constituents are different, taking a massive interest in these constitutional matters, but it was not my experience that people were hanging on to every detail of such matters.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my near neighbour for giving way. If his constituency was emasculated, as mine was, a different number of issues might have been raised by those said constituents.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, but the point about the Boundary Commission review is that there has been clear public consultation, with 35,000 responses from participants, meaning that this was a democratic process. The Boundary Commission has undertaken a clear process in coming to its conclusions.

People outside the House may think that September is a long way away, but it is only four full sitting weeks away, so it is sensible that we do what the Government suggest and wait for the Boundary Commission reports to be produced, for the Government to have an opportunity to introduce Orders in Council, and for the House to make a decision. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, who did not take an intervention from me, but he was factually wrong in saying that a motion in the House should trump what the boundary commissions are doing. I fundamentally disagree, because the commissions obey an Act of Parliament—the law of the land passed by both Houses of Parliament. I know that he does not accept the other end of the building as a legitimate part of Parliament, but it is until that is changed. Parliament passed an Act and that is the law of the land. That is what the boundary commissions are following, and a motion of the House does not trump an Act of Parliament; only another Act of Parliament can trump it. Fundamentally, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's premise.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Is not the point that a previous Parliament, which does not bind this Parliament, passed a set of guidelines for the Boundary Commission that this Parliament thinks were not accurate and do not take in the right detail, and that that has bound the hands of the Boundary Commission? We are not complaining about the work of the Boundary Commission but, unfortunately, about the work of a previous Parliament. This Parliament, which is not bound by that Parliament, has agreed that a Bill that would change those requirements should go into Committee. All that we are asking for is a consideration of this Parliament's views.

Mr Harper: I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but he is not right. The previous Parliament passed an Act that remains the law until another piece of legislation changes it. That has not happened. A motion in the House has not in itself changed the law. I shall come on to the point about process.

Sir Desmond Swayne *rose*—

Mr Harper: If my right hon. Friend will forgive me, I will make a little process because I am mindful of Madam Deputy Speaker's injunction about trying to keep our remarks to nine minutes.

I want to gambol through some of the points made by the shadow Leader of the House, including what she said about numbers. As the Minister who introduced the original legislation, may I say that there is nothing magical about 600? I was asked the question at the time, and it was a manifesto commitment when we were elected in 2010 that we would reduce the size of the House to save money. It was a reduction of about 10%, but we settled on a sensible number rather than a random one. There was nothing magical about it. There was a huge suspicion among Opposition Members that that was some magical number with magical properties. It was not—it was a round number that was significantly lower than 650. The reduction would save a significant amount of money, but there was nothing particularly suspicious about the number.

The shadow Leader of the House mentioned the Opposition's wish to move from boundary reviews every five years to every 10 years. There was a specific reason why we went for five. There is a choice to be made. My own view is that we can either have infrequent boundary reviews, which will be significant, because there will be a lot of population movement in between, or we can have more frequent boundary reviews which, by virtue of that fact, will be less disruptive because they take lesser population shifts into account. The decision made by the last but one Parliament was to have more frequent boundary reviews that individually would be less disruptive. Of course, the first one—particularly if moving from 650 Members to 600, and if there has not been one for 20 years—is clearly disruptive, but once that has taken place, subsequent reviews will be less disruptive. There is much to recommend in that approach.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Harper: I took a lengthy intervention from the hon. Gentleman, so I will make a little progress.

The issue of the so-called missing voters was raised by the hon. Member for Walsall South and in a couple of interventions, including from the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith). Matt Singh from Number Cruncher Politics has done a significant piece of work on this, which was also validated by the Library. There would be an issue if the distribution of new voters who are not on the register used for the current boundary review was significantly different across the country. However, analysis shows that the distribution of new voters on the electoral roll is broadly consistent with the distribution of those on the existing registers. In other words, although the absolute number of voters is different, those voters are not significantly differently

distributed across the country, which means that they will not make a material difference to the distribution of constituencies.

It is worth pointing out that we have to carry out a review and draw a line somewhere, and that as soon as we start a review, it will effectively be out of date. The Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton refers to the register for the 2017 general election. That is already out of date because there has been another one. If we take his logic, we will never have a boundary review, because every time we start, a new register arrives and is out of date.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the new legislation to which he referred made it far more difficult for young people to register? That legislation was passed under a coalition Government. One party in that coalition supported an increase in tuition fees having promised that there would be no fees, and the other party knew that its support among young people was minimal to say the least.

Mr Harper: I do not agree with that at all. I would argue that the individual electoral registration system that we introduced, which addressed the accuracy and completeness of the register, as well as the fact that we enabled online registration made it much easier for people to register to vote. The vast majority of people who register now do so online, using a very straightforward piece of software that is particularly attractive to younger people. Before each of the last significant electoral events—the European Union referendum and the 2017 general election—significant numbers of people, particularly young people, seemed to have no trouble registering to vote.

I am mindful of your injunction, Madam Deputy Speaker. Given that I have taken a number of interventions, let me make my final argument for why the House should reject the motion and what we should do instead. The right way to proceed would be to allow the boundary commissioners to report. The Leader of the House could then consider those reports, bring forward Orders in Council and allow the House to take a decision. If the House decides to accept the Orders in Council, we are done. The boundary review will have been accepted, we will have new boundaries and the problem will be sorted out.

If, for some reason, the House chooses not to do that, there will be a debate about those Orders in Council and the Leader of the House will be able to reflect on that debate. If the Government decide to table a money resolution, we can then consider the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton in the light of that debate, but with one significant change. This is a constitutional measure. When the original legislation was taken through Parliament, it was considered in Committee on the Floor of the House, rather than by a Bill Committee upstairs, meaning that every Member from every part of the United Kingdom could take part.

We should allow such a debate to take place. If the House does not support the boundary reviews and decides that it wants a money resolution and to proceed with the Bill, it should be considered on the Floor of the House so that every Member can contribute, rather than in Public Bill Committee. That is why we should wait. We should look at the results of the boundary

[Mr Harper]

review and allow the Government to reflect on the debate that will take place, and if the House chooses not to adopt the proposals, we can then proceed on a more sensible basis. That is why it makes sense to follow the Leader of the House's arguments, to reject the motion, and to allow the House to consider the boundary commissions' reports in the usual way.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

Order. Just before I call the next speaker, let me be clear. When I said everybody could take nine minutes, that does include interventions. Otherwise, I will have to impose a time limit.

5.24 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): We can all agree that boundary changes are needed. Our current boundaries are based on an electoral register that is 18 years old. There is, however, a question as to how we go about it. We have a boundary review going on at the moment, which is due to report to Parliament in September. The 2017 election gave us a minority Government who have spent the past year hobbling from week to week trying to keep themselves together. This weak Government do not have the support to win a vote in the autumn and push through controversial constitutional changes. The Tory-dominated Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee said as much in its recent report. It concluded that the Government "cannot be confident" that the House of Commons will support the implementation of the Boundary Commission's proposals when they come before us in the autumn.

The question we are faced with now is this: do we let the Government continue in their delusion that if they put off addressing the issue until the autumn the enormous opposition to the current review will magically melt away, or do we deal with reality and put in place a realistic cross-party compromise that delivers new boundaries before the next election? My private Member's Bill is a serious attempt at the second option, but it has been frustrated by the Government's procedural manoeuvrings.

My Bill does three major things. First, it retains the 650 MPs we have at the moment. Secondly, it provides for boundary reviews every 10 years. Thirdly, it ensures that the 2 million people who have registered to vote since 2015 have their voices heard in the boundary review. The referendum and 2017 general election saw huge surges in voter participation, primarily among young people. I am passionate that they should be represented in the boundaries that will shape the result of future elections, but the Government are not interested in encouraging participation in our democracy. Recent voter ID pilots disenfranchised legitimate voters, many of whom already faced barriers to democratic engagement. All the while, the Government have been padding out the unelected House of Lords to avoid defeat on proposed Brexit legislation.

Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his Bill. I think it does have some good points. First, on voter ID, in my Woking

constituency the turnout actually increased and we had very strict voter ID in place. Secondly, I would like to ask him a question. During all the years the Labour party was in power over the past 40 or 50 years, was there any occasion when it supported a private Member's Bill on a constitutional or parliamentary boundary issue from a Member of the main Opposition, or, if it passed Second Reading, gave it a money resolution? Any Bill at all over the past 50 years?

Afzal Khan: I am not sure how relevant that is to this discussion, but I am a new Member and I do not know the whole history.

The Government are happy to increase the size of the unelected Chamber, at greater cost to the public purse, while cutting the elected side and discouraging participation in what goes on here.

On the money resolution, many people are put off getting involved in politics and Parliament because it is so difficult to understand what goes on here. The private Members' Bill process is arguably the worst culprit. The process is clearly broken. The public were rightly outraged by how easily the upskirting Bill was blocked last week, even when it had the support of the Government. Similarly outrageous is how easily the Government can block a private Member's Bill, even when it commands overwhelming cross-party support. Today marks 200 days since my Bill passed its Second Reading unanimously. Our Committee has so far met five times. We have had discussions about money resolutions, the financial sovereignty of the Crown, "Erskine May" and the Bishop of Chester, but we have not yet discussed a single line of the Bill.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about the difficulty of getting private Members' Bills through. I will have a private Member's Bill on 23 November—it is No. 21 of 23, with the House set to sit for only five and a half hours. There is absolutely no chance of the Bill being debated and we will then be in a situation where it has to come back another time. Is one of the solutions to have more sitting Fridays for private Members' Bills to allow more time for them to become law?

Afzal Khan: I would be quite happy if the House decided to have more Friday sittings.

I never expected to become an expert in such a narrow aspect of parliamentary procedure, but unfortunately I have spent the last few months reading up on money resolutions, rather than working towards a compromise on boundaries. I have learned that there is a clear parliamentary convention that the Government bring a money resolution after Second Reading of a private member's Bill. In 2015, a Government Minister reaffirmed this, saying that

"once the House has given a private Member's Bill a Second Reading, the convention is that the Government, even when they robustly oppose it, always table a money resolution".—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 926.]

Since their devastating failure at the general election, the Government have gone against their words. Despite money resolutions having been tabled for many Bills further behind in the queue, none has been forthcoming for this Bill. Too weak to defeat my Bill on a vote, the Government are hiding behind procedure. With complete

disregard for democracy, this minority Government are abusing their Executive power to defy the will of the House. We have had business questions, points of order, an urgent question and an emergency debate on this already. These have surprised even me by the extent of cross-party agreement. Opposition parties were united in calling on the Government to table a money resolution. Conservative Back Benchers were lining up to condemn their own Ministers.

It is a shame that we have been pushed to table this motion today. It would be much better for the Government to respect procedure, the will of the House and the will of their party, and bring forward a money resolution, but, given the Government's continued refusal, we have been forced into this position. The Government's time is up; we must make progress on this important Bill. To honour the conventions of the House and the will of Parliament, Members must support this motion.

5.32 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I find myself in an unusual position today, because it is a matter of record that I very much support the aims of this private Member's Bill, but I am very concerned that the motion before the House sets a dangerous precedent that undermines the role of the Government and the Executive. We have heard a lot today about the respective roles of Parliament and the Executive, and it is very important that we understand and uphold the convention of that separation of powers and that those roles are understood and maintained. I may return to that point in a minute.

I do not believe that now is the right time to be cutting 50 Members of this House. I understand the reasons why the coalition Government made that decision. At the time, I was not a Member and I did not think that it was the right thing to do, but I understood why the decision was made. However, the fact is that the world has changed since that Bill was passed. We are leaving the EU. We will be losing 73 Members of the European Parliament and all their work—I understand that we could have a debate about how much work MEPs actually do—will be coming to this place. Therefore, I do not believe that it is a sensible move to reduce the democratic representation in this House by cutting the number of MPs. That is my position.

If we want to cut the size of Parliament, let us start by cutting the number of Members of the upper Chamber. That is where I would begin.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I agree with my hon. Friend's arguments, but I also think my right hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire West has found a good way forward. If we act in accordance with his suggestion, we could satisfy both courts.

Steve Double: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has jumped straight to the conclusion of my speech. I will come to that point in a moment.

This is very much a local issue for me as a Cornish Member.

Nick Smith: I want to take up the point made by the right hon. Member for Gloucestershire West when he said the then Government were trying to bring down the cost of politics by reducing the number of MPs

from 650 to 600. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that argument is undermined by the fact that since 2010 more than 200 new peers have been created?

Steve Double: I understand that point.

In Cornwall, the proposed new boundaries will result in a cross-border seat between Cornwall and Devon. In many parts of the country, people might not understand why that is such a big deal, but it is felt very strongly in Cornwall, and is felt even more strongly now, because in 2014 the Government recognised the Cornish as a national minority under the framework convention of the Council of Europe, saying that doing so would afford the Cornish the same recognition as that enjoyed by the other Celtic peoples of the United Kingdom—the Scottish, the Welsh and the Irish—and no one would entertain a cross-border seat between Wales and England or Scotland and England.

Given the protection the Cornish now enjoy under the framework convention, I believe it was fundamentally wrong to have proposed this cross-border seat. If his Bill proceeds, I would ask the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) to consider a protection for Cornwall like that provided for Northern Ireland, so that the six Cornish seats might be protected and maintained in recognition of the minority status the Cornish now enjoy.

Mr Harper: I wish to make a public service announcement, Madam Deputy Speaker. In case other hon. Members wish to make interventions referring to me, I wish to let them know that my constituency is the Forest of Dean, not West Gloucestershire. It could possibly become West Gloucestershire if the current Boundary Commission proposals are voted in, but at the moment it is the Forest of Dean, and very proudly so.

Steve Double: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention.

Emma Hardy: The hon. Gentleman has my full sympathy when he talks about constituencies crossing boundaries. It might sound like a joke to Members, but the fact that the new constituency boundaries would cross over from east Hull into west Hull is felt very deeply by people in my area. There is a strong and long-standing division between the east and the west, yet the new boundaries would take a lump out of west Hull and add it to east Hull. The proposals do not respect the traditional areas.

Steve Double: I would not dare to comment on the sensitivities of Hull, but the hon. Lady has made her point very well.

As I said earlier, we have today discussed the role of the Executive in Parliament, but fundamentally it is the responsibility of Parliament to decide how many Members there should be. It would be wrong for the Executive to try to force through a cut when the new number does not enjoy the support of a majority in the House. It would be undemocratic. I accept the point that a Bill was passed in a previous Parliament to cut the number, but that should not be imposed on the House in the current circumstances. I ask the Government to consider allowing Members a free vote when the boundary proposals are brought before the House, so that we can express our views free from the Whips and look to our consciences in deciding whether this is right for our nation. It would be the right thing for the Government to do.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that his point about Cornwall is shared in Wales, where the proposal is to reduce the number of seats from 40 to 29, which arguably would shift power from Westminster to Cardiff and so have significant consequences for devolution. The situation in Wales is similar to that in the constituency of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). Under the new proposals, there are seats where people cannot get from one end of the constituency to the other without driving through two others on route. Does he accept that this is not a desirable proposition?

Steve Double: The boundary proposals throw up many anomalies in various parts of the country, which, in my view, are very unhelpful and, in certain cases, unacceptable. That is why I think that it would be right to reconsider the proposals.

I will not support the motion, because I believe that it is the wrong way to address this issue. Although I support the Bill, I believe that passing the motion would undermine the Government's role, for all the reasons that have already been given today. I am content to wait, as the Government propose, to allow the new boundaries to be discussed in the House and for us then to take a view.

If there is a majority in favour of the boundaries, so be it—I will have to accept that—but my hunch is that there will not be. If the House accordingly rejects them, one way to deal with that is to pass the money resolution, and we can then consider the Bill on that basis. I would prefer us not to have to go through all that, but I accept that the right way for the House to address the issue is to allow matters to take their course on that basis. Let us see what people's views are at the time, and then decide how to proceed. If the private Member's Bill does make progress, however, it will have my wholehearted support.

5.41 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Before addressing the specifics of the motion, let me make a general point. I have no problem at all with the argument that constituencies should be of equal size. My concern relates far more to the fact that the Government are proposing that we reduce the number from 650 to 600, which is a completely arbitrary figure pulled, essentially, out of thin air.

Let us get one thing straight. The Government's arguments for that reduction are completely spurious. They talk about the cost of politics, but we are already set to lose 73 Members of the European Parliament, which will deprive the public of the representation that they provide; and, of course, they are more than happy to continue stuffing the House of Lords to the brim. The whole process is, in essence, a bare-faced gerrymander.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Has my hon. Friend observed that there has been absolutely no word from the Government that they intend to cut the number of Ministers? What they are actually doing is proportionately increasing the size of the Executive as well.

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend is clearly psychic, because that is precisely the point that I was about to make. The ratio between Front-Bench and Back-Bench

MPs is, in terms of balance, vital to the way in which our democracy works. Back Benchers play a critical role in holding the Government to account. The fewer of them we have, in whichever party happens to be in power, the fewer are able to fulfil their public duty, and that will reduce, critically, the amount of scrutiny that is given to vitally important issues. Arguably the most important issue that our country has faced since the second world war is coming towards us, so the House will have an increased workload, and the role of Back Benchers in holding the Executive to account will become even more important. Workloads will increase for not only for Westminster, but for Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast.

There is also a compelling constituency reason to undermine the argument for reducing the number from 650 to 600. There is real concern about the impact of the reduction on the social and cultural dynamics of each constituency. It is crucial for MPs to represent areas with natural communities and shared interests.

Emma Hardy: I made a point earlier about Hull East and Hull West. There is also a proud fishing tradition among the Hessle Road community in Hull, which goes back for years. The new boundary will divide that community—a community that has existed for hundreds of years. Does my hon. Friend agree that that should be looked at again?

Stephen Kinnock: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Some absurd things are being thrown up by this review. For example, in my constituency the proposal was to have a boundary line which separated the shopping centre from the high street. It is utterly absurd and ludicrous.

The fact is that wherever we draw the line on a map when driven by a rigid mathematical equation we carve up communities, force unnatural alliances and throw communities together in ways that do not make sense and that end up deeply alienating the people we are elected to represent.

Rachel Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify these critical issues that affect communities all over the country, as Members on both sides of the House have done, but does he not agree that this is precisely why the Boundary Commission is doing its work, during which he and all of us, and members of the public, have had the opportunity to put forward precisely such views, which the commission will consider and then produce proposals?

Stephen Kinnock: The fundamental problem with the logic of the hon. Lady's argument is that this is about the terms of reference that the commission was given: it was given terms of reference based on 600 and on a very narrow quota of 5%. Based on that, the Boundary Commission had its hands tied and inevitably was going to end up with some of the completely absurd proposals we have seen.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Does my hon. Friend also agree with the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in the previous Parliament, which said that the changes every five years will mean there is great disruption for communities meaning that they never settle down? It will

also cost the Exchequer more because there is a five-year rotation. The Bill's proposal would change that to 10 years, provide safety and security for communities to build, and save the Exchequer money.

Stephen Kinnock: I agree with my hon. Friend. It provides that stability and continuity and also, given the 7.5% quota, the changes would not be that radical even on a 10-year basis, so it is an incremental change.

Why are the Government ploughing ahead? The bottom line is that the entire boundary review process has been a bare-faced gerrymander, and that is combined with the use of procedural devices and backstairs manoeuvring to block the will of the House. That is further evidence of the Government's willingness to abuse the power vested in the them. The Procedure Committee's 2013 report concluded:

"Government policy is not to refuse a money or ways and means resolution to a bill which has passed second reading."

The view of the Procedure Committee must be paramount in this case.

The Government clearly have no respect for this House or our democracy more widely: first, there was their £1 billion bribe to the Democratic Unionist party and now there is this. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), who unfortunately is not in his place now, is therefore absolutely right to push the Government to do right by our democracy and to bring forward his Bill.

It is essential that 2.1 million new voters are heard. It is essential that my constituents and many of the constituents across this House are fairly and properly represented. And it is essential that this Government are prevented from riding roughshod over our democracy.

5.48 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), although I will be taking issue with some of the more lurid assertions he made in his speech.

I recognise the importance of this issue. I started my political career canvassing in 2009-10 and I vividly remember the expenses scandal and the anger of our constituents and voters on the doorstep. I remember, too, the calls at that time to reform this House and to look at some of these very important issues. It is therefore right that the Government at that time kicked off this process: they appointed the Boundary Commission and set about this important work as part of the wider work to reform politics and cut the cost of politics and bring transparency and decency back into this place. However, I have trouble with, and cannot agree with, some of the arguments that have been advanced in today's debate. The debate seems to be based on a suggestion that the Boundary Commission's original terms of reference were flawed—

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: They were.

Rachel Maclean: We have heard that a few times. Of course, I was not here at that time, but in my opinion, the arguments that have been brought forward today do not stack up. Did someone want to intervene on me?

Sir Desmond Swayne: I'll have a go! The issue before us is that private Members' Bills are determined by a queue which is the result of a ballot. The Government

are accused of manipulating the queue by withholding money resolutions. Interestingly, what happened last Friday was an attempt by the Government to manipulate the queue by taking a Bill that was No. 8 and getting it a Second Reading on the nod, and my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) has attracted universal opprobrium for preventing that. That is the irony.

Rachel Maclean: Well, I think "Follow that if you dare" is an apposite comment. I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention, and I will proceed with my remarks.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) is not in his place at the moment, but he is an honourable man and I respect his campaign on this issue. Of course he has garnered a lot of sympathy across the House. We have heard about the issues that our constituents have with boundaries, and they are valid concerns. It is right that we should be airing them in this House. However, the assertion seems to be that this private Member's Bill is the best way of dealing with those issues, and I do not agree with that.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: The hon. Lady says that she does not understand the flaws of the previous Bill. The only way to correct the flaws of a previous Bill is to bring forward an alternative Bill. Surely, taking figures not from an election but from a lull period in the electoral register, reducing the number of seats and not allowing the Boundary Commission to take into account census figures, demographics, community boundaries and county boundaries are all reasons why—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Interventions need to be brief. There are plenty of people waiting to speak, and it is not fair if interventions are too long.

Rachel Maclean: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It is not that I do not understand; it is that I do not agree. Those are two different things.

We have here an assertion that a private Member's Bill, which was debated on a Friday, can better reflect this very serious issue than the Boundary Commission itself. The Boundary Commission has carried out thousands of hours of investigation and heard submissions from members of the public up and down the country. It has given all our constituents an opportunity to have an input on these important issues. That is the way to do democracy, and that is the way to deal with this important issue.

Steve Double: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend, and she is making some very good points. On that last point, the overwhelming majority of the thousands of people in Cornwall who submitted representations to the Boundary Commission do not want a cross-border seat. However, the legislation as it stands does not allow for there not to be such a seat; there has to be one. The views of local people cannot be taken into consideration because the legislation does not allow it.

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I would not dare to comment on the sensitivities of Cornwall and Devon, but I am sure that

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his comments have been heard and that they are very valid. He made some good suggestions in his speech about how to proceed—or possibly it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper). There have been some very good suggestions from people who are much more expert on this topic than me, and I think we should go further with those.

I would like to address the point about the lack of an ability for voters to register. That argument seems to have been used several times to suggest that we should stop the Boundary Commission's work or that it is flawed, but this issue is always going to exist. However, we have recently seen some excellent work by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), who has brought forward a number of successful initiatives. Government money has been committed in order to get more voters on to the register, with hugely successful results. Surely this is the right way to tackle this issue. We need to look carefully at what is preventing voters from registering, and to make it easier for them. It is now possible to register online, for example, and I welcome that.

The work is bearing fruit, and it is the way to tackle the issue, rather than bringing forward private Members' Bills to undermine something that has been going through Parliament for some considerable time. It seems that we are tying ourselves up in knots. My constituents would be surprised to hear that the Government are accused of gerrymandering or trying to undermine democracy when they have seen, week after week, attempts by Opposition Members to undermine Brexit—the biggest democratic expression of will that this country has ever seen.

I reject the assertion that has been levelled at the Government and the Conservative Members. Democracy needs to work through this process. Members have made many sensible suggestions as to how sensible concerns can be taken on board, but if we allowed today's motion to pass, that would be an abuse of process and would set a dangerous precedent that I do not support. I will therefore not be voting for the motion today.

5.55 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I hear what the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) says, but I do not agree with her. However, I do agree with the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). The problem is that the House needs an early indication from the Government of what they propose to do with the boundary review's proposal, as laid by the Government, to reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600.

I know that enough Conservatives feel unhappy with what the proposal implies. It was always going to be controversial, notwithstanding the fact that the Government thought that they had the majority of the House behind them. My contribution will be short, because I just want the Government to test the will of the House to see whether they have the support to reduce the number of MPs to 600. I do not believe that they have that support. It would be much better to clear that matter out of the way and avoid the boundary commissions ending up in a stramash, with them feeling that they have wasted a lot of time in trying to take forward

something that is unacceptable to the House. I hope that they will be able to start again and carry out a process that they would find a lot easier without being under the imprimatur of having to reduce the number of MPs by a ridiculous amount.

The boundary review could not achieve the 600 figure without doing things to my seat and to that of the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay whereby we would end up with something that is fundamentally flawed. The House has always understood that the constituencies are based on not just number, but location.

Steve Double *rose*—

Dr Drew: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who may help me.

Steve Double: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comments. I used to feel very much like him, but does he agree that we are now so close to the boundary commissions' reports—only four sitting weeks—that we as may well wait? Voting on the commissions' submissions will be the test that he talks about.

Dr Drew: That might well be true but, to be fair, the boundary commissions must to some extent try to pre-empt things and read into what has happened in successive debates and discussions—not necessarily just in the Chamber, but as result of what has happened in the Chamber. We should have an early vote and clear away some of the unnecessary disagreement.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) said, this is entirely based on the idea that we can just chop 50 people out of this House without making a difference, but that is fundamentally flawed. This is either gerrymandering for party political advantage or it is just about cost saving. As I said on Monday, the easiest way to save costs would be to get rid of the other place. That might be controversial, but it would be more democratically acceptable to many of our constituents who feel that this primary Chamber should be protected. Some of our constituents will unfairly end up in a constituency that they do not know, despite coming from one in which they had at least some idea of what the location meant, with the knowledge of who their MP was and that they could feel some confidence in them.

Let us get on with it and have an early vote, let us dump the notion that we can just chop 50 MPs, and let us go back to 650 MPs. We can then move forward. Whether we do that through the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) or some other device, let us do it. That is the fair approach, and I think it is what the vast majority of our constituents want.

I hope that the Government will take notice and that we can have a clear system in which we stick to 650 MPs, with constituency boundaries that mean something, rather than what we would end up with if we went to 600 MPs. I think that everyone would be largely satisfied with that.

6 pm

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew). He said that he agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). If he

follows my hon. Friend's arguments exactly, he will be voting with the Government in the Lobby, so I look forward to seeing whether he agrees or not.

I have taken a keen interest in private Members' Bills in my short time in the House. Some have accused me of taking a rather curious interest, but I blame my hon. Friends the Members for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), neither of whom is able to speak in the debate because of their other duties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills promoted the NHS (Charitable Trusts Etc) Act 2016—Peter Pan and Wendy's Bill—which was the first private Member's Bill in which I participated on a Friday. I have successfully taken a presentation Bill, the Road Traffic Offenders (Surrender of Driving Licences Etc) Bill, through Second Reading and Committee, only for it to be objected to on Third Reading. Yes, there was a lone voice of objection, but it was not the voice of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope); it was another Member. I will return to that procedure in due course.

I entirely understand the passion of the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) and his concern for piloting his Bill through this place. Taking legislation through the House is a difficult and treacherous business, and perhaps it should be, because surely it should not be easy to place legislation on the statute book. The one consolation of losing my private Member's Bill was that it would not have succeeded in any event, because a general election got in the way, although of course that is rather cold comfort.

The motion does not touch on the merits of the boundary changes, but it is important that I express my view, as other hon. Members have done, because it seems beyond argument that there should be an equalisation of the number of constituents in each constituency. Doubtless there will be exceptions from the south to the north, and both my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) and the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) would argue passionately for why their constituency should be of a different size.

At the moment, for example, we have Arfon, a constituency of about 41,000, whereas North West Cambridgeshire has more than 93,000 electors. I have an electorate of 65,000, and also in my county is the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), which has an electorate of over 82,000. My other hon. Friends in Dorset have electorates ranging between 72,000 and 75,000. They may well think that I have an easy time of it and am slightly less busy than they are. I, of course, would argue that that is not the case, but there is a point about reorganising the boundaries to equalise the electorates.

Dorset, not unlike Cornwall and other areas, presents challenges. On the current iteration of the proposals, there will be a cross-county seat and we will lose a Member of Parliament. Be that as it may, I firmly believe that reorganisation and the equalisation of constituencies is beyond argument.

I have a novel point to make, which is not always possible for the last Government Back Bencher to speak. G. K. Chesterton is not quoted often enough in this place, and I think that I have time to read out the full principle of Chesterton's fence—the principle that reforms should not be made until the reasoning behind the existing state of affairs is properly understood. I will quote this section in full:

“There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, ‘I don't see the use of this; let us clear it away.’ To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: ‘If you don't see the use of it...Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.’”

We would be well advised to take advice from that principle in this case, in two respects. The first is in relation to private Members' Bills when one Member objects; the second is in relation to the financial privilege afforded to the Government of the day.

I was bitterly disappointed, of course, when my Bill was objected to by just one Member—I repeat that it was not my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch. When that procedure was raised in a point of order by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), Mr Speaker rightly noted that a single voice objecting to a Bill does not count just on a Friday. He said:

“I should point out, in fairness and for accuracy, so that no one is misled, that the rule about a single objection applies similarly to any other business before the House after the moment of interruption.—[*Official Report*, 18 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 50.]

He then referred to Standing Order No. 9(6).

Before we look at procedures and say, “Let's just get rid of that,” we should first look at what their purpose is, and then at whether they serve that purpose and, if not, how we should reform them. On reform, the second area to which all this applies is the financial privilege afforded to the Government of the day, whereby there is a clear constitutional right to initiate financial resolutions. That is my novel point: Chesterton's fence, which should be spoken about more often. Perhaps Chesterton should also be quoted more widely in such debates.

Mr Harper: My hon. Friend's point about objections relates to my point about the proper consideration of the Bill. One reason why we should not accept the motion is because this is a constitutional matter. If we were to proceed with the Bill's Committee stage, that should be done not upstairs, where only a relatively small number of Members are able to participate, but on the Floor of the House. However, that should not happen until we have had chance to consider the boundary review proposals.

Michael Tomlinson: As so often, I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. What he says is right, and it links to my initial point that it should not be easy for us to make laws in this place—there should be challenge and full debate, both on Second Reading and in Committee.

We should look forward to the Boundary Commission bringing back its proposals. My right hon. Friend made another astute point when he said that that is only four sitting weeks away. We can wait that long for the commission to bring back its proposals so that they can be introduced and debated in this place. Let us then see what the consequences of that are. It would be rash and foolish—it is too soon—to support the motion today, and I will not be doing so.

6.7 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), who recited G. K. Chesterton

[David Linden]

—that is a new one and I might try it tomorrow in the Public Bill Committee. I have the distinct pleasure of leading on this Bill for the Scottish National party. Although I am thoroughly enjoying our standing engagement to meet on a Wednesday morning to discuss a motion to adjourn, I really think it would be better for the Committee to move on to discuss the substance of the Bill brought forward by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan).

The House will recall that this Bill was given a Second Reading, unanimously, on 1 December 2017, after the Government's attempts to defeat the closure motion were voted down by 229 votes to 44. Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole, will talk about how we have to wait only four sitting weeks, but they do not mention that this Bill passed its Second Reading last year. Frustratingly, it then took some 159 days to establish the Bill Committee, which has met on five or six occasions now. As you will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the job of the Bill Committee is to scrutinise the proposed legislation clause by clause, line by line and, if necessary, to scrutinise any competent amendments.

As I set out on 1 December last year, the SNP broadly supports this Bill. However, it is not a perfect Bill and I am seeking to amend it in one specific regard. We certainly welcome the relaxation of requirements so that the electorate per constituency has to be to within 7.5% of the electoral quota to preserve local representation. However, I am concerned that the Bill contains a provision in clause 1 for a fixed number of MPs for Northern Ireland but not for Scotland. I shall certainly seek to table amendments to that effect in Committee but, of course, I am currently prohibited from doing so because the Government have not granted a money resolution. That is troubling, because when he gave evidence to the Procedure Committee in 2013, the then Leader of the House of Commons, Andrew Lansley, said:

“To my knowledge, Government has provided the money resolutions...whenever we have been asked to do so.”

A 2013 report by the Procedure Committee, of which I am a proud member, concluded:

“Government policy is not to refuse a money or ways and means resolution to a bill which has passed second reading.”

I understand that Conservative party policy is to cut the number of MPs to 600, and I am not questioning the Conservatives' entitlement to hold that legitimate view, but we all know that there is a parliamentary majority in the House for retaining 650 MPs while committing to review what I accept are old boundaries. The current boundaries came into force when I was 11 years old and I am now 28. I do not think any of us contest the need to look at the boundaries again, but we do contest the concept of reducing the number of MPs from 650 to 600.

Trying to kill the Bill in Committee by grinding Members into submission or holding up the parliamentary process is not clever, and nor do I believe that it will actually work.

Michael Tomlinson: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the Government are not trying to kill the Bill? As the Leader of the House set out clearly in her speech, we are waiting for the boundary commissions to come

back in four short weeks. Thereafter, we will consider the Bill's position. We are not trying to kill the Bill; we are waiting.

David Linden: No, the Government have essentially treated the Bill like the bins: they have put it outside and are waiting for it to fester. We all believe that Parliament is taking back control—that we are leaving the European Union and this is going to be a sovereign Parliament. On 1 December last year, Parliament gave the Bill its Second Reading and the House resolved that it should go into Committee. That is the issue. It is not for the Government to decide that they are just going to leave it there in some sort of political purgatory. That is the fundamental point.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I serve on the Procedure Committee with the hon. Gentleman and am always interested in what he has to say. He is making an interesting case, but is he against the idea of reducing the House's size from 650 to 600 MPs? That is one of the two issues that really ought to be considered today.

David Linden: I fundamentally object to the number of MPs being cut from 650 to 600. My view is that we could cut 59 MPs from this Chamber by Scotland being independent, but until such a time as the people of Scotland vote for that in a democratic referendum, I believe that this House, which is taking back lots of powers from the European Union, should have MPs who are able to scrutinise the Government.

I am mindful that the terms of the motion do not allow for a rehash of last year's Second Reading debate, and nor is it about the general principles of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill. The motion before us seeks the leave of the House to permit the Bill Committee to move from parliamentary purgatory to legislative scrutiny. Arguably, the motion is perhaps not the sexiest that the House has ever considered, although perhaps I think it is: right hon. and hon. Members will see that it is largely procedural. I must confess that when I saw the motion on the Order Paper, my initial reaction was to lament how disappointing it is that rarely allocated Opposition slots are being taken up to unblock the logjam of Back-Bench Bills, but the reality is that the Government have caused this problem.

Now, more than ever, Westminster has become a place of limited democracy, as perhaps best exemplified by the utterly broken private Member's Bill system. On a point of principle, I fundamentally disagree with the notion that the main way for Back-Bench MPs to introduce Bills is via a lottery or a ballot. I have more chance of winning a raffle at the Garrowhill Primary School fair than I do of being able to introduce a private Member's Bill through the route available.

Michael Tomlinson: The hon. Gentleman could always do what I did and queue up for the chance to introduce a presentation Bill. He would then have the opportunity to get his own Bill on the statute, as well. Many Members from different parties have followed the procedure.

David Linden: The hon. Gentleman is right, but the presentation Bill that he queued to introduce under

Standing Order No. 57 was defeated—it was objected to—so there was not actually a way to get it on the statute book.

I do not agree with some of the tactics deployed, when it suits them, by what some in this place have dubbed “the awkward squad”. Over the weekend, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) rightly found himself the centre of what I can only presume was much wanted public attention, after he objected to necessary English legislation introduced by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) that would stop perverts taking photos up ladies’ skirts. The hon. Member for Christchurch appears to have a long-standing, albeit selective, view that private Members’ Bills should not receive parliamentary approval. I must confess that I was somewhat surprised when the House considered the Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). During exceptionally short proceedings, the hon. Member for Christchurch did not object to the money resolution that evening, and I see that the Bill, which was 92nd in the queue for this Session, has now reached Report stage.

Perversely, Bills that have passed Second Reading on sitting Fridays but do not have the support of the Government have been kicked into the parliamentary purgatory that is Public Bill Committees. Indeed, some have not even got that far. The UK Government have failed to heed calls for reforms of the private Member’s Bill process, and now they break their own conventions and ignore the will of Parliament. The Procedure Committee issued reports calling for major changes to the process in September 2013, March 2014, September 2015, April 2016 and October 2016. I certainly hope that the Procedure Committee will hold another inquiry very soon. Their changes have largely been ignored by the Government. They have noted that the procedures “disenfranchise Members who may wish to support a bill being promoted by a colleague and are misleading to the public and to the interest groups who seek to use it to advance legislative change”.

The problem is that this is a Government who are still acting as though they have a parliamentary majority. They do not appear to engage properly in Opposition day debates, and they certainly do not vote in the vast majority of them. If the House divides this evening, I will be very interested to see whether the Government take part. They have stuffed the Standing Committees of this House with a majority of their Members, even though they are a minority Government. They have done their level best to ensure that the Democratic Unionist party has been given £1 billion to ensure that some of their legislation gets through; and they have dealt with private Members’ Bills in a way that is exactly consistent with that approach.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman and I enjoy our sparring on Wednesday mornings, and I look forward to doing so again tomorrow. I have just a couple of points to make. First, the Democratic Unionist party has not been given a single penny. That money is for the people of Northern Ireland, and it is important to make that point. Secondly, the House decided the composition of Public Bill Committees, not the Government.

David Linden: We all remember the photographs of the former Government Chief Whip, the Prime Minister and the leader of the Democratic Unionist party. I don’t

know; maybe it was a coincidence that it was announced that £1 billion was going to Northern Ireland on the same day that the confidence and supply agreement was signed. I am no expert.

The way in which the Government continue to deal with private Members’ Bills makes a mockery of this place. In essence, the Government are treating the House with sheer contempt. The Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill is, I am afraid, probably just the tip of the iceberg. The Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) is also still awaiting a money resolution. Indeed, it has not even gone into Committee. His Bill has not even got to the pleasurable stage of meeting on a Wednesday morning to consider a motion to adjourn, yet my hon. Friend has cross-party support. I think that the reason why the Government are stonewalling that Bill is that, again, they realise that there is a majority for it in the House of Commons.

I am mindful of time, and I will close by saying that the Government are playing fast and loose with the procedures of this House. They might think they are being big and clever, but they must remember that one day—perhaps sooner rather than later—they will be on the Opposition Benches and they could be subject to the same type of behaviour. The Government risk setting a precedent that may just one day come back to bite them on the bottom.

6.18 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I am not one of the awkward squad, I trust, in the Chamber today. I hope that I am a paragon of reasonableness, but today I really must protest because my constituency is the elephant in the room. It is one of the two largest constituencies in the United Kingdom. I have the honour to represent the counties of Caithness, Sutherland—a vast county—and part of Ross and Cromarty. It is a gargantuan, gigantic constituency. I would like to share some facts about it with the House.

The journey from Evanton in the south-east to John O’Groats is 103 miles; it takes me two hours and 21 minutes. It takes two hours and 49 minutes to drive the 115 miles from Lochinver in the south-west to Wick in the north-east. My constituency covers 3,675 square miles. To give hon. Members an idea of just how big that is—although I know that some already understand—we could fit all 73 London constituencies in my constituency, and have room left over around the sides.

Members might think that, although I am not in the awkward squad, I am mumping and moaning today. But I get about. I am young, fit and enthusiastic, but with the best will in the world, it is very hard to cover the communities within my constituency, even when driving hither and thither at maximum speed. The point is that constituencies and communities have a right of access to their elected Member. Despite doing what I hope is my best, if there is a shortfall in what I can do in terms of reaching out, why would I not suggest that there is a slight democratic deficit?

The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who is no longer in his place, said that the identification and identity of communities is colossally important. I can tell hon. Members that somebody speaking Gaelic in the south-west of my constituency and somebody

[Jamie Stone]

living in Caithness not only do not speak the same language; the cultures are also very different indeed. It makes as much sense as putting Aberdeen city with Argyllshire. It just does not make sense.

The proposal of the Boundary Commission for Scotland would make my constituency even larger—massively larger. We can talk in this place until the cows come home about money resolutions and private Members' Bill, but when an idea is stark raving bonkers, like this one, it just has to be said loud and clear. We have heard a quotation from G. K. Chesterton, so let me give the House a famous quotation by P. G. Wodehouse, who said:

"It is never difficult to distinguish between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine."

Well, today I do have a bit of a grievance.

In closing, I take comfort from the words of the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and others on both sides of the Chamber. I do hope that some sense can prevail. My constituents talk about many things, and one of them is the prospect of making my constituency even bigger. I may not hold the seat, as I may be voted out, but whoever represents the seat will have a very difficult time representing those good people if the constituency gets any bigger.

6.22 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): It has been the honour of my life to represent the constituency in which I was born for the last 21 years. For all but a brief and unheralded period as a Whip, I have been a Back-Bench MP. I do not regard my job as second rate to any shadow Minister or Minister, as the role of constituency MP is a vital one in our democracy and political discourse. Everything that has happened over the past 20 years has made me feel that even more. Whether on Brexit, austerity and the huge effects of significant cutbacks in public expenditure that have fallen on the poorest in our constituencies, people who have had hard times finding work, people who cannot find homes or people who feel that the NHS is not meeting their needs, it is our job to represent those voices. Reducing the number of constituencies would make that job harder. It would make it more difficult to represent the voiceless and therefore to keep our political show on the road.

Under the first proposals from the Boundary Commission, my constituency of Mitcham and Morden was to be split across five different parliamentary constituencies. That is the fault not of the Boundary Commission, but of the rules that it was required to enforce. One fairly moderately sized London constituency was to be split between Streatham, Wimbledon, Tooting, Sutton and Cheam, and Carshalton and Wallington—a total of four different London boroughs. Whether I continue to be the MP for Mitcham and Morden or not is not the point. My constituency has deep and abiding ties that bind it, including hundreds of years of history in the parishes of Morden and Mitcham. People believe that they live in an area, that they are part of a community and that they know who to blame when things go wrong.

So why do it? Why reduce the number to 600? Why not 700? Why not 550? Why 600? People talk about equalisation. What do we mean by equalisation? We mean the numbers in the parliamentary constituency. But

what about the people who live in my constituency, some 11,000 of them, who cannot vote in a parliamentary election but can vote in a local election? When somebody comes to my advice surgery, I—like, I am sure, all Members of this House—do not ask them, "Are you an EU citizen? Can you vote in a parliamentary election? Are you on the electoral register?" That is not my job. It is my job to represent my constituents, whatever their status, to the best of my ability.

Equalisation—what equalisation? What list, what community, and what factors? We know that young people are less likely to be registered than older people. We know that certain ethnic minorities are less likely to be registered. We know that private renters are less likely to be registered. We know all those things but we wish to exclude those people and have more of them living in some urban constituencies. Is a poor black boy not as entitled to be represented as an older woman from the home counties? Equalisation—what equalisation?

We hear about saving money. I have a suggestion: if we want to save public money, which is a perfectly laudable suggestion, why not introduce automatic electoral registration? Victoria state in Australia, with a population of 3.5 million, managed to get 95% accuracy on its register by employing five people. In my borough of Merton, there are currently 155,841 people on a register of some sort, and we employ more than five people to get that number of people on to it. So if we want to save money, we could get a better form of electoral registration.

But this is not about any of those things. It is not about representation. It is not about saving money. It is not about equalisation. It is about the profound effect of the American Republican party on the Conservative party. It is about issues of electoral registration, presenting ID at polling stations, gerrymandering boundaries and breaking up communities. I have had the absolute honour to fight for President Barack Obama, as candidate and President, in two elections. I have been to Ohio; I have been to Virginia; and I have seen where they deregister people, taking away their right to vote, and gerrymander their boundaries. That provokes anger and discontent, and people feel that they are not a part of legitimate society.

I urge one nation Conservatives to think about the impact of these reforms on our society at a time of great turbulence. Some things matter more than small issues of political expediency. This is about the way we run our democracy. The fact that our boundaries are determined by rules and not by party political preference is really important to us. We need to have a cold, hard look at what the impact of these boundary changes will be and what this says about us and our democracy.

6.28 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): We have heard today from G. K. Chesterton and P. G. Wodehouse, which is of course a pleasure. Nevertheless, it is a matter of regret that we have had to hold this debate because the Government should long ago have respected the wishes of this House and proceeded to move the necessary money resolution. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) for persevering in holding the Government to account.

The Public Bill Committee, of which I am a member, has now had six sittings to try to scrutinise this important Bill, which passed its Second Reading in this Chamber

by 229 to 44 votes. However, we have been unable to consider a single clause because of the highly unusual step taken by the Government to refuse to table a money resolution.

Michael Tomlinson: I think it is in fact better than the hon. Gentleman stated, because those were the votes on the closure motion. I believe the House voted unanimously for the Bill's Second Reading.

Christian Matheson: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for correcting me, and he is absolutely right.

This has not only become a routine drain on parliamentary time and resources for everyone involved, but is deeply disrespectful to Members across the House who sent a strong message to the Government last December that they wanted the Bill to be considered in Committee. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton that it is now 200 days since that vote took place. It is vital that we uphold parliamentary sovereignty, which is why I am pleading for all Members across the House to support the motion.

We are where we are, and I pay tribute to hon. Members for their participation in the debate. The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper)—or, dare I say it, West Gloucestershire?—talked about the fact that his constituency might become West Gloucestershire. Of course, he would also have to be adopted by the association to be the candidate, but I am sure that it would have no problem adopting him. He mentioned the 35,000 responses to the Boundary Commission's review. I will hazard a guess that most of those responses were complaining about how daft the review was, based on the parameters set by the Government. I will say one thing about him: he has been an assiduous attender of the Bill Committee, even when only a motion to adjourn was moved, and I pay tribute to him for being one of the few Conservative Members who has taken that procedure seriously.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, who is an old friend, told us that he has become an expert in parliamentary procedure. With that expertise, he reminded us that the convention is that the Government always table a money resolution on Second Reading.

The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) gave a brave speech and said that the circumstances in the world have changed. He talked about the motion setting a dangerous precedent, but I put it to him that the dangerous precedent is surely the Government ignoring the will of the House by ignoring the Second Reading vote.

The hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) talked about her introduction to politics in 2009-10 and all the demands for parliamentary reform at that time. I suggest that those demands were for reform of the expenses system, which is what was causing all the difficulties around this place, not of parliamentary boundaries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) presented us with an easy solution to the problem: an early vote, so that the Government could test the will of the House on a reduction from 650 to 600 seats, which would save time and resources. He made the important point that we need to remember that we represent place as well as simply numbers.

Then we come to the G. K. Chesterton fan, the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), who talked about the difficult and treacherous business of taking forward legislation. He is right that legislation should be difficult and should be tested, but if there is any treachery, dare I say it?—I hope I am not being unparliamentary—it might lie on the Government's side of the House, with Ministers not respecting the will of the House on Second Reading.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) reflected on his experiences on the Procedure Committee and reminded us that money resolutions are always provided. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) said that his constituency is 103 miles one way by 115 the other—as big as London—and that the new boundaries would make it even more impossible to manage.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who represents the constituency of her birth, talked about the history of those parishes providing a real sense of community. She reminded us that our role here is to represent the voiceless, and she spoke of the 11,000 residents of her constituency who are not on the register but nevertheless need representation. It has been an excellent debate.

Mr Goodwill: People not being on the electoral register is not just an urban issue. In constituencies such as mine, many people have second homes and are not on the electoral register. They vote in local elections in many cases, but they require help from their MP if they have problems concerning the local authority. It is not just in inner-city constituencies that there are more constituents than the number on the register.

Christian Matheson: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Of course, someone who has a second home is perhaps registered elsewhere, but my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden was making a particular point about those who are not on any register but still require representation.

The Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton seeks to resolve a controversial 5% variation in the size of constituencies. As we all know, under the new rules outlined in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, all constituencies are required to have a quota between 95% and 100% of the national quota. The consequences of that rigid 5% threshold are that some communities will be split up, while others are merged and dragged into other communities. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) discussed that and spoke about the crazy effect on his high street, which would be split, with the shopping centre on one side and other shops on the other.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee recommended that that constraint be relaxed to 10%—a proposal rejected by the then Government in 2015—so I welcome the flexibility that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton has shown. He has listened to Conservative Members who believe that the 10% quota is too large, and he has taken their views into consideration. Relaxing the quota to 7.5% would mean that a majority of constituencies would not change at each election, which would strike the right balance and mean that each boundary review would be less disruptive.

[*Christian Matheson*]

The reduction in the number of MPs from 650 to 600 runs contrary to good sense in many ways. At a time when we are planning to leave the EU—hon. Members made this point—and supposedly return control to the UK, we need to maintain numbers in the House. All that the reduction in numbers would achieve is a reduction in the ability of Parliament to scrutinise the Government—another point made in the debate. At the same time, the Government have appointed more unelected peers to the other place than any other Government, so it is absurd that they should reduce numbers in the elected Chamber.

The Hansard Society did not find any rationale for the Government's decision, noting that there was

“real concern”

that the number had been

“plucked from thin air—600 simply being a neat number.”

Cutting 50 MPs represents a crisis of scrutiny—a concern expressed by the Electoral Reform Society and by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon. Finally, it is vital that constituencies represent the communities that they serve.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): There is no better example of that than my constituency and the number of people I represent. Thirteen thousand people registered to vote in the 2017 general election, increasing the size of the electorate by nearly 10,000. Under the Government's proposals, that community would be decimated because of the arbitrary point about numbers. The Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) absolutely rectifies that and puts the registration date at the right point.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend gives an example of communities that are not reflected in parliamentary constituencies. My fear is that there are plenty of examples across the House, not simply in Leeds, where that would happen. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden and plenty of others that that link would be broken.

A major flaw with the boundary reviews is that they were based on the December 2015 electoral register. Since then, as we have heard, over 2 million people have been added to the electoral roll, following the increase in registration for the EU referendum and the 2017 general election. Some Government Members argue that the date for any boundary review is inevitably a snapshot. However, 2015 was not just any year. It was the year 600,000 people dropped off the electoral register after the Government's decision to rush through the introduction of individual electoral registration, against the advice of the Electoral Commission.

Mr Harper: It is absolutely right that a significant number of entries were removed from the register, but the point was that many of them were not legitimate. Individual electoral registration was introduced to deal with accuracy and completeness. Having lots of people on the register who do not really exist is not a good thing—it is a bad thing—and it is good that we fixed it.

Christian Matheson: I have no doubt that electoral registers have to be cleaned up, but I cannot believe that there were 2 million people on the electoral register

who simply did not exist. The right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) discussed people with second homes. I am on two electoral registers, as I have a place in London because of this job, but the numbers are few and far between, and I do not believe that 2 million have dropped off for any reason other than that when IER was introduced it made it more difficult to register.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden referred to Republican party tactics that I would describe as voter suppression. I am not suggesting this of the Government, but I would be concerned if those tactics found their way to this side of the Atlantic and it became harder for people to vote and take part in the democratic process.

Rachel Maclean: I feel that I need to put it on the record that I completely refute any assertion that I, as a Member of this House, have been influenced by the tactics of the Republican party on the other side of the Atlantic.

Christian Matheson: I consider that point to have been put on the record.

London lost almost 100,000 voters, despite experiencing a rise in population. However, the bigger issue—bigger than the details of the flawed boundary review—is the relationship between the Government and this House. This House gave the Bill a Second Reading with a hefty majority; indeed, it did so unanimously, as the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole reminded us. It should not be for the Government to ignore the wishes of the House, which were expressed so clearly on Second Reading. If we are taking back control, that control should reside in this House, not with the Executive. Running away from debate by using procedural chicanery gives a dreadful impression of the Government, so our proposal tonight is to allow the Bill to continue its detailed consideration in Committee.

I know that, like me, many hon. Members across the House cherish the status of this House and its sovereignty. They might not agree with the aims of the Bill proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, but they will understand that it is wrong to block its passage by anything other than a vote in this House. For that reason, and to stand up for the primacy of the House of Commons, I invite all hon. Members to join me tonight in supporting the motion and allowing democracy to thrive—not to vote against the Government, but to vote for this House.

6.41 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): It is a pleasure to close this Opposition day debate. I welcome the contributions from hon. and right hon. Members from across the House. May I take this opportunity to welcome the new hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby), who I can see in her place? I hope she has enjoyed this afternoon's debate, in the first of many weeks in which she will be participating in the House's business. It is a pleasure to see her in her place. As a fellow by-election winner, I can sympathise with her, given her no doubt frenetic first week. I wish her every success in her work, as does the whole House.

We heard from the inimitable hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who gave us a tour of his views on many things and who likes to paint himself as a peacemaker. I for one in the Government would welcome that role from him. I look forward to spending many more pleasurable hours in his company, talking about, for example, the frameworks that we will put in place on our departure from the European Union and how they will add to the powers of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and a future Northern Ireland Assembly.

I also welcome the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), who helpfully reminded the House that the debate on the order relating to the current boundary review is but four sitting weeks away. Like him, I think that that is a reasonable period to be able to anticipate.

I thank the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), who rightfully spoke on his Bill. May I say what a pleasure it is to spend time with him and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) every Wednesday morning? We are endlessly entertained by the hon. Member for Glasgow East, who most recently did his best to list every single Member of the House of Lords. As you will know, Mr Speaker, it is not in order in any debate in this House simply to read out a list, so he was gently guided back towards a better form of debate.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who reminded us that Cornwall and the issues of the Cornish must never be shared and must never be split asunder. Only a few nights ago, we had a debate I remember very clearly, relating to another part of my portfolio, on the representation of the Cornish national identity, which I look forward to reprising with him.

We heard from the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who I cannot see in his place at this moment and from my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean). She reminded us of the height of public opinion in 2009 and 2010, which was when I entered the House, arguably as a result of the expenses scandal, in the by-election I had the great privilege to win. We also heard from the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), who put on record some very serious points, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson). He was extremely helpful in enlightening the House about the rule of G.K. Chesterton.

Let me add to this list the comments of the hon. Member for Glasgow East, who I have already mentioned, and the hon. Member for Stone, who reminded us of what it means to fulfil constituency duties in a considerably larger geographical constituency than many of the rest of us. I thank the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who put some issues on the record with passion. I admire and respect that passion, and I am glad she came here today to do that.

Let me address some of the issues raised in the debate before returning to the motion. A number of points were made about the procedures of the House for private Members' Bills. I will not go into that in detail, because it is not my place to do so. It is a matter of procedure. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made a few remarks about that earlier on, but I think it is a matter for another day.

Remarks were made about reform of the House of Lords. The hon. Members for Glasgow East and for Stroud and I, with others, had a debate on this matter only yesterday in Westminster Hall—what a long time ago that already seems. In that debate, I had cause to remind Members, and I will do so again now, that the size of the House of Lords is smaller than when the current Prime Minister took office. To all those hon. Members who have said that the House of Lords has grown, I say in fact it has not; it has become smaller.

Afzal Khan: What is the Conservative party's position in relation to the upper House? Why are you stuffing it with the unelected when you are trying to cut the elected?

Mr Speaker: I have not been stuffing the upper House for anybody. I am not doing that. The Government can answer for their own position, of course.

Chloe Smith: And nor are the Government. The key point, as I have just said, is that the other place is now smaller than when the Prime Minister took office. That is as a result of a policy of restraint, which she is showing in appointments, and of the Government policy, which the hon. Gentleman invites me to set out. I will take just a minute on it, Mr Speaker.

David Linden: Will the Minister give way?

Chloe Smith: I am just in the middle of setting out the Government's policy, which I have been asked to do.

We do not believe that reform of the House of Lords is the correct priority at this moment. There are many other things that the two Houses are being asked to consider. The House of Lords itself has set out a number of ways to reform without the need for primary legislation. We seek to support it in that.

David Linden: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. She talks about reform of the House of Lords and cutting the number of MPs in this House. The Bill received a Second Reading on Friday 1 December 2017. Since then, how many new Conservative peers have been put into the House of Lords?

Chloe Smith: The hon. Gentleman will remember from our debate only yesterday that the number of the most recent appointments made is 13. Let me repeat one more time, should it be needed, that the number of Lords has reduced since the Prime Minister came into office. In part, that is due to a culture and a new policy of retirement, which I welcome and which we did go into in some detail yesterday, so I will leave that there.

I want to respond to a couple of points that were made about the policy of individual electoral registration. I welcome the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) to his relatively new position on the Front Bench—it has already been very good to serve with him on Bill and statutory instrument Committees—but I am afraid that he is wrong in his remarks about IER. He spoke about a drop in the register that he thinks occurred after it was introduced. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean explained, what we saw after the introduction of IER was that both accuracy and completeness were maintained. The crucial point

[Chloe Smith]

is this: we expect the accuracy of the register to be able to be maintained at a higher level with the introduction of IER, because it encourages individuals to register themselves, individually—the clue is in the name. It is about accuracy.

The hon. Member for City of Chester conflated it with a second, separate issue, which is whether more have joined the register since. That is indeed the case. As the register currently stands, it is larger than it was in December 2015. That is a good thing. That is because our reforms to open up online registration, for example, and the occurrence of several major elections have encouraged many people to register. That is an unmitigated good thing. This Government are committed to helping more people to register to vote. That is what I stand for as the Minister responsible for electoral registration and other matters. I want to see it done with the security and integrity of the register foremost in mind. We have had debates in this place and elsewhere that suggest that the Labour party is not quite so committed to those principles. That is what we saw in some of the desperate slurs that have been made this afternoon. We have heard words such as “gerrymandering” and about the “manipulation” of the register from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood. I think that is outrageous. I said so early on in the debate and I say it again: it is an outrageous calumny to say that the Government are gerrymandering or trying to manipulate the register. I am not. The Government are not—does he think we are, really?

Mr Mahmood: Perry Barr, not Ladywood.

Chloe Smith: I stand corrected, and I thank the hon. Gentleman. Let me move on to the ways in which this debate has been important this afternoon and deal directly with the motion in front of us.

Jamie Stone: I thank the Minister for her gracious reference to me a few minutes ago. I point out in passing that the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) and I are two exceedingly different people, and we would both be equally embarrassed to be confused. Does the Minister recognise my point that distance and geography have to be taken into consideration by the Boundary Commission for Scotland?

Chloe Smith: I stand corrected twice in a row on hon. Members’ constituency names—perhaps I need the help of the Boundary Commission to rearrange constituencies and thus learn them better. In all seriousness, I say to the hon. Gentleman that the Boundary Commissions are independent. This is crucially important, and he would not expect me in this debate to be able to prejudice their reviews, and nor would I try to do so. Although I respect the points that he came here today to make, it is not for me to answer the question that he just posed.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman makes a very sensible point about the geographical size of constituencies. That was indeed considered when we looked at the rules that the Boundary Commissions were set. I accept that he may not feel that there was sufficient flexibility, but there are rules that govern the maximum geographical size of constituencies, thus giving the Boundary Commissions some scope to reflect the issues that he raised in the House today.

Chloe Smith: I very much welcome that reminder from my right hon. Friend.

Turning to the motion, the debate has been about a fundamental principle of how this House functions, but this is not about the Bill from the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. It is about whether a Committee—any Committee—can be permitted by the House to disregard this place’s rules and conventions.

The Opposition motion seeks to undermine a fundamental principle and cornerstone of our constitutional settlement: the financial initiative of the Crown. It is a long-standing constitutional principle that the Government of the day initiate financial resolutions. I can only apologise to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire if he thinks this another lecture—perhaps in his day students walked out of lectures if they did not like them. It would be regrettable if he felt the need to walk out of this discussion. The Government have to be responsible and accountable to taxpayers for the money they spend. The motion seeks to erode the fundamental principle that the Crown, through its Ministers, who are accountable to Parliament, has the exclusive right of initiation and of defining the purposes for which the money is required.

Mr Goodwill: The Minister drew our attention to the situation over the border. Do the Scottish Government delegate power to the Scottish Parliament to set spending, or do they protect the money as the UK Government do?

Chloe Smith: I welcome the opportunity to add to this discussion, but the question of whether we can learn from the mechanisms of other Parliaments and Governments might have to be a debate for another day.

The mechanisms of this Parliament are that a Committee requires a money resolution to go through the substance of a Bill. If a Committee is allowed to consider the substance of a Bill in the absence of such a resolution, the Crown, through its Ministers, loses its important constitutional right to define the purposes for which that money is required. That is not just about being able to make progress; it is not just about saying, “Don’t worry about the money. It’ll come later”; as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House set out earlier, to do this to a Committee would strip it of the ability to consider matters properly. As she set out, without such a resolution, a Committee would just be aimlessly wandering through a Bill with or without amendments but not properly guided by a money resolution. At best, it would be theoretical, at worst farcical, and that is not what our constituents expect of us.

The motion questions the role of the Executive—that is regardless of what party is in power. The fundamentals of any Government are that they take decisions and are accountable for them—to taxpayers where it is about how public money is spent. That is what it means to be a responsible Government. From what I see on the Order Paper today, I do not think the Opposition believe in responsible government; they believe in political points scoring. The House runs on its conventions and the assurance that centuries-old practice and procedure is there to protect the rights of all parliamentarians. The Government respect those rights of the House, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House set out earlier. To undermine that for party political reasons by

tabling such a motion compromises the idea of the Opposition ever being a responsible Government. The Government are elected by the people and have the right and duty to initiate financial proceedings in the interests of the taxpayer.

As my right hon. Friend made absolutely clear at the start of the debate, the motion has nothing to do with the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. I am sorry about that. I am sorry that he has come here today, as he does every Wednesday morning, to talk about a Bill for which the House has not granted him financial authority. I am sorry about that because he is a lovely man—we get on well on Wednesday mornings—and clearly has the support of his friends around him in the Chamber, but I am afraid that his party is letting him down with the motion on the Order Paper tonight. They are suggesting a huge move in the procedures of the House, all hung around his Bill. His Bill has merits, and those could be discussed, but there is not the time to do so.

Afzal Khan: I thank the Minister for her kind words. For me, this is not the fault of the Labour party. Every week for five weeks we have come here, only for nothing to be done. Not a single word in the Bill has been dealt with. That is the issue. That is where time is being wasted.

Chloe Smith: If that is the issue, the hon. Gentleman should have had a word with his Front-Bench team about laying a better Opposition day motion. This motion did not allow him to have those issues out today, although many hon. Members have enjoyed going through related subjects.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Main Question accordingly put.

The House divided: Ayes 284, Noes 299.

Division No. 190]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Abrahams, Debbie	Brock, Deidre
Ali, Rushanara	Brown, Alan
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Brown, Lyn
Amesbury, Mike	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Bryant, Chris
Ashworth, Jonathan	Buck, Ms Karen
Austin, Ian	Burden, Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Burgon, Richard
Bardell, Hannah	Butler, Dawn
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Byrne, rh Liam
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cadbury, Ruth
Benn, rh Hilary	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Berger, Luciana	Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Betts, Mr Clive	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Black, Mhairi	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Blackford, rh Ian	Carden, Dan
Blackman, Kirsty	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Champion, Sarah
Blomfield, Paul	Chapman, Douglas
Brabin, Tracy	Chapman, Jenny

Charalambous, Bambos	Greenwood, Margaret
Cherry, Joanna	Griffith, Nia
Clwyd, rh Ann	Grogan, John
Coaker, Vernon	Gwynne, Andrew
Coffey, Ann	Hamilton, Fabian
Cooper, Julie	Hanson, rh David
Cooper, Rosie	Hardy, Emma
Cooper, rh Yvette	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Harris, Carolyn
Cowan, Ronnie	Hayes, Helen
Coyle, Neil	Hayman, Sue
Crausby, Sir David	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Crawley, Angela	Hendry, Drew
Creagh, Mary	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Creasy, Stella	Hermon, Lady
Cruddas, Jon	Hill, Mike
Cryer, John	Hillier, Meg
Cummins, Judith	Hobhouse, Wera
Cunningham, Alex	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hollern, Kate
Daby, Janet	Howarth, rh Mr George
Dakin, Nic	Huq, Dr Rupa
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Hussain, Imran
David, Wayne	Jardine, Christine
Davies, Geraint	Jarvis, Dan
Day, Martyn	Johnson, Diana
De Cordova, Marsha	Jones, Darren
De Piero, Gloria	Jones, Gerald
Debbonaire, Thangam	Jones, Graham P.
Dent Coad, Emma	Jones, Helen
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Jones, Sarah
Dodds, Anneliese	Jones, Susan Elan
Doughty, Stephen	Kane, Mike
Dowd, Peter	Keeley, Barbara
Drew, Dr David	Kendall, Liz
Duffield, Rosie	Khan, Afzal
Eagle, Ms Angela	Killen, Ged
Eagle, Maria	Kinnock, Stephen
Edwards, Jonathan	Kyle, Peter
Efford, Clive	Laird, Lesley
Elliott, Julie	Lake, Ben
Ellman, Dame Louise	Lamb, rh Norman
Elmore, Chris	Lammy, rh Mr David
Esterson, Bill	Lavery, Ian
Evans, Chris	Law, Chris
Farrelly, Paul	Lee, Karen
Farron, Tim	Leslie, Mr Chris
Fellows, Marion	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Lewis, Clive
Fletcher, Colleen	Lewis, Mr Ivan
Flint, rh Caroline	Linden, David
Fovargue, Yvonne	Lloyd, Stephen
Frith, James	Lloyd, Tony
Furniss, Gill	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Gaffney, Hugh	Lucas, Caroline
Gapes, Mike	Lucas, Ian C.
Gardiner, Barry	Lynch, Holly
George, Ruth	Madders, Justin
Gethins, Stephen	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Gibson, Patricia	Mahmood, Shabana
Gill, Preet Kaur	Malhotra, Seema
Glindon, Mary	Mann, John
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Marsden, Gordon
Goodman, Helen	Martin, Sandy
Grady, Patrick	Maskell, Rachael
Grant, Peter	Matheson, Christian
Gray, Neil	Mc Nally, John
Green, Kate	McCabe, Steve
Greenwood, Lillian	McCarthy, Kerry
	McDonagh, Siobhain
	McDonald, Andy

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan

Saville Roberts, Liz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John

Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack

Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael

Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward

Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher

Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie

Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles

Whately, Helen
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Mims Davies and
 Kelly Tolhurst

Question accordingly negated.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

Ordered,

That the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (Cooperation and Information Sharing) Regulations 2018 (S.I., 2018, No. 607) laid before this House on 23 May be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we will take motions 4 and 5 together.

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

CAPITAL GAINS TAX

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Mauritius) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 23 April, be approved.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief and International Tax Enforcement (Cyprus) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 30 April, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

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

POLICE

That the draft Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice) (Revision of Codes C, E, F, and H) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 21 May, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome

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

7.15 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to speak in my first Adjournment debate since being elected last year.

Complex regional pain syndrome—CRPS—is one of the most painful conditions known, registering a staggering 42 out of 50 on the McGill pain scale. That is worse than the pain of the amputation of a finger or toe with no anaesthetic, which registers as 40 out of 50, and it is worse than childbirth—the Minister may sympathise with me on that. CRPS is not a short-term pain that will heal in time. The most excruciating part is that the pain is long-term, and likely to be for life. In fact, CRPS is known as the world’s most painful incurable condition. In the United States, it is referred to as the “suicide disease” as it can lead sufferers to resort to suicide as the only means to escape the huge pain that they bear.

CRPS is a chronic neuropathic pain condition—a disease of the nervous system—and it usually starts with a minor injury or fracture to a limb. The major indicator is the huge amount of pain involved, which is out of all proportion with the original injury. The affected limb can swell, change colour and change in temperature and, instead of reducing in time, the pain just gets worse. It can lead to weakness of the limb, ulceration of the skin, wasting tissue and bone thinning. The pain caused by CRPS spreads over time and may even develop in the opposite limb or in other limbs. Patients with CRPS most likely live with anxiety and depression because of the amount of high-level pain they are in 24/7.

CRPS is not a well-known condition, although awareness of it is increasing thanks to the national charities that work hard to support sufferers and to promote the need for treatment. Six months ago, I was not aware of CRPS, so I want to pay tribute to my constituent Victoria Abbott-Fleming, whom I have met. Victoria qualified as a barrister, but six months after a minor accident at work, at the age of just 24, she received a diagnosis of CRPS. The symptoms included a burning, severe pain in her lower leg, a freezing cold sensation, and a stabbing feeling that she said was like 1,000 ice picks pushed into the skin and bone. Victoria described it as like having petrol put through one’s veins and set alight. Her other symptoms included major swelling, hair and nail loss, hypersensitivity, temperature change and stiffness that prevented her from walking.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The hon. Lady, through her constituent’s experience, is painting a vivid picture of the pain. Does she agree that hearing accounts such as that of my constituent Helena Stone—she said it was like barbed wire being tightened across one’s leg—give an insight into the viciousness of this debilitating condition and make it all the more important that we raise awareness of it?

Ruth George: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. While we can listen to descriptions of the pain, we can never really have any idea of what it is like. The worst thing about CRPS is that the pain is not

occasional and something that a person knows will get better—they know it may be with them for the rest of their life.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I sought the hon. Lady’s permission to make an intervention before the debate.

Whenever I say in my office that I am in pain, my girls say to me, “You don’t know what pain is. If you had given birth, you would know what pain is.” The girls in my office tell me that chronic regional pain syndrome is even more painful than labour and giving birth, so I understand just how extreme it is.

We look to the Minister for support and help, as we always do—and we always get it, by the way. Does the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) agree there is an onus on GPs to be more aware of the illness and to see how they can provide help in their surgeries? The Minister can give some direction to the NHS as a wee bit more needs to be done in surgeries and health clinics.

Ruth George: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I know that he has made inquiries and asked questions about CRPS over the years. All the sufferers thank every MP who raises the issue and helps them to feel that they have hope.

Apart from the physical and mental pain suffered due to CRPS, a severe part of the torture that my constituent Victoria experienced was the judgmental attitudes of medical professionals who did not understand or were not aware of the condition and the shame that she felt. She says, “The medical profession sometimes don’t believe your symptoms, or try to fob you off by saying, ‘Are you sure it is not in your head?’ or, ‘You look well. Are you sure you’re actually ill?’” Those problems are even worse now that we see children being diagnosed with CRPS, because children are often not believed when they say that they are in excruciating pain.

Alex Chalk: The hon. Lady is being extremely generous in giving way. My constituent experienced the problem of not being believed. Does the hon. Lady agree it is all the more galling that the NHS website recognises the condition and states that it is “poorly understood”? Does that not make the point that the situation needs to change?

Ruth George: The hon. Gentleman makes the pertinent point that CRPS is poorly understood, and that more understanding and awareness is needed from medical professionals.

After Victoria developed ulcers and total skin breakdown, she was told in 2006 that she needed to have her leg amputated above the knee at just 27 years old. Like many CRPS sufferers, she was unable to use a prosthetic limb because the prosthetic was too tight, pressing hard on the hypersensitive skin where she had had CRPS and inducing excruciating pain in her stump.

Victoria was left wheelchair-bound and unable to work as a barrister because many courts are completely inaccessible to wheelchair users, and because of her strong medication and her mental unwellness due to her situation. She pays tribute to her husband Michael, who saw her through the toughest of times and still supports her.

In 2014, Victoria received the even more devastating news that the condition had spread to her remaining leg, which she needed to have amputated. Amazingly, as a dual amputee, she has come through the experience and set up a national charity, Burning Nights, which offers support, understanding and explanation to CRPS sufferers. The charity offers a voice at the end of the phone, as well as very important advice when sufferers feel they cannot take any more.

The trouble is that we do not know how many people are living with CRPS. When I asked a parliamentary question, I was shocked to be told that the Department of Health and Social Care does not collect data on the number of people diagnosed with CRPS as it “is not classifiable within the ICD10 clinical coding”.

That means that a box on an NHS computer cannot be ticked for CRPS. Various statistics have been suggested by the health profession and in the light of experience in other countries, but the most widely accepted figure is that there are about 26 people in 100,000 living with CRPS, which would equate to more than 15,000 sufferers in the UK. That means that CRPS does not even qualify as a rare disease but, as other hon. Members have said, many medical professionals have not even heard of it, let alone are aware of its symptoms and signs that would lead to diagnosis.

Too many patients are made to feel that they are making a fuss when they are actually in agony. That is not surprising, given that only 20 minutes during a medical degree concentrate on chronic pain—it is only 90 minutes for physios, who deal with people in pain all the time. Diagnosis takes an average of six months, but it may take even longer, especially for children, who are less likely to be believed when they are in severe pain. Once a diagnosis has occurred, it can take two years, or even three in some parts of the country, for a referral to a specialist pain clinic. I cannot imagine the pain of CRPS, let alone the added pain of knowing that nothing will be done to help for two or three years when every day, and especially every night, is agony—that does not bear thinking about.

Many treatments are effective only in the early stages of the disease, such as neuromodulation or DRG—dorsal root ganglion—treatment. Pain clinics usually offer medication and some physio for about six months, but sufferers are then usually discharged and told that there is nothing more that can be done. Unsurprisingly, they therefore may seek whatever they can, and in some cases that is amputation. I am afraid that private surgeons are offering amputations to people with CRPS at the knockdown price of £5,000 below the knee and £10,000 above it. People with CRPS are in such agony that they are prepared to undergo such an amputation because they think it may get rid of their pain. Unfortunately, as my constituent Victoria has told me, it does not, and often the pain does not go away. However, serious problems can arise when such amputations and major surgery are carried out by private surgeons. At the moment, the NHS picks up the bill for that. I very much hope that it will continue to do so, but this really makes the case that what we actually need is some hope, proper diagnosis and proper support, and a clinical pathway for people with CRPS that will see them through not only their diagnosis, but long-term and lifelong treatment.

I have various proposals for the Minister, as I am sure she was expecting. They are based on the parliamentary questions I have been asking over the past few months.

The first and perhaps most important is for her to put that tick-box on the NHS computer so that we can collect data for CRPS diagnoses. Without data on diagnoses, it is difficult to make a proper case for research and for the increased training and awareness of the medical profession that is needed.

In response to my parliamentary question about research, the Minister said:

“The NIHR is committed to maximising the potential impact of research that it funds for patients and the public. Applications to NIHR for research funding are subject to scientific peer review, with awards being made on the basis of value for money, scientific quality and the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services.”

Unless we know the numbers of patients who are suffering, however, it is impossible to decide whether an application for research is value for money.

My second request is on the protocols for diagnosis. Yes, we need to raise awareness among health professionals, as other Members have stated, but we also need to introduce protocols such as the one used at Liverpool’s fracture clinic. CRPS is common after a fracture, and at Liverpool the limb is checked after a plaster cast comes off if it looks unusual, or if unusual pain is reported. In that way, a diagnosis can be made early.

My third request is for an increase in the capacity of pain clinics. It is not acceptable that people have to wait an average of two years, and up to three years, to get the support that they so desperately need. That would probably help to address my fourth request, which is for mental health support for CRPS sufferers, with a 24-hour helpline—the pain is particularly excruciating at night—to help them to get through without feeling that they have to resort to amputation or even suicide.

My final request is for the Minister to meet my constituent, Victoria Abbott-Fleming. In spite of the difficulty involved in travelling with her condition, she has come down from Derbyshire to hear the debate. She has done so much to support and fight for other sufferers. CRPS is not a diagnosis that we would wish on anyone, and I hope that the Minister can offer some hope to its thousands of sufferers.

7.30 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I congratulate the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) on securing this debate on such an incredibly important issue. She has articulated quite beautifully the hell that people suffering from complex regional pain syndrome go through. The only thing that I can even slightly identify with is the pain of childbirth, but even after that it is unimaginable for us to conceive of the sort of day-by-day endurance and the relentless pain that people suffer. It is a devastating condition and can lead to an overwhelming impact on sufferers and their families, so I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this subject to the House.

The potentially extreme nature of the condition and its symptoms, some of which the hon. Lady described—the excruciating pain, burning, swelling and skin discolouration—can be totally disruptive to everyday living and destroy a person’s quality of life. She spoke very movingly about her constituent Victoria Abbott-Fleming, whose story is incredibly upsetting. I very much forward to meeting Victoria and assuring her that I will do everything I can to move forward on the issues that the hon. Lady

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

mentioned. In circumstances in which extreme decisions have to be considered, high-quality care and support can sometimes make a huge difference to someone's experience of our health and care services.

I hope that, as I am sure the hon. Lady intended, this debate will help to raise awareness of this very debilitating and extremely painful condition. It has actually been recognised as a medical condition for around 150 years, but problems remain with the diagnosis of CRPS in its very earliest stages. Diagnosis involves excluding a lot of other more common conditions—such as infection or things like rheumatoid arthritis—that can have similar symptoms, and the causes remain largely unknown. Precipitating factors can include injury or surgery, but there is no relationship to the severity of trauma and the development of the pain. In some cases, there is no precipitating trauma at all. It is considered likely that because of the complex nature of the condition, there is absolutely no one single cause. That means that it is difficult to estimate how prevalent CRPS is, as many cases may not have been correctly diagnosed in the first instance.

To improve public awareness, the NHS Choices website provides comprehensive advice on the causes, symptoms and treatment of CRPS. In addition to that, various charities work in this area. The hon. Lady mentioned Burning Nights, which was set up by her incredibly brave constituent; if someone is in unimaginable pain, I can only imagine what a comfort it is for them to be able to speak to or hear from somebody who has experienced it themselves. The charities do great work to support not only the patients who have the condition but their families.

As the hon. Lady says, general practice is where patients with CRPS are most likely to be seen in the first instance. CRPS is a key part of the GP curriculum; it is identified as a key area of clinical knowledge in the Royal College of General Practitioners' applied knowledge test content guide. The test is a key part of GPs' qualifying exams, and it ensures that they have the knowledge needed to work as a GP in the NHS.

To improve identification and management of the condition, in 2013 the Royal College of Physicians published best practice guidance for clinicians on the diagnosis, referral and management of CRPS. This guidance was developed with the involvement and endorsement of 21 key organisations involved with the care of people with CRPS, including the Royal College of General Practitioners, the British Orthopaedic Association, the British Pain Society, the British Society for Rehabilitation Medicine and so on.

The guidance, as the hon. Lady says, recommends prompt diagnosis and early treatment. This is to avoid the secondary physical problems associated with disuse of an affected limb and the incredible psychological consequences of living with undiagnosed chronic pain. It has been shown that an early referral to physiotherapy,

for example, and encouraging gentle movement as early as possible, may prevent progression of the symptoms. Patients with CRPS are generally best managed in specialist pain management clinics.

Ruth George: Will the Minister look at the proposal to set up protocols in fracture clinics and clinics where carpal tunnel surgery is performed? Prevalence of CRPS following such surgery or an injury is particularly pronounced.

Caroline Dinenage: I will certainly look at that.

The hon. Lady mentioned delays in referral to a pain clinic, which is something that concerns me. Waiting times should be about 13 weeks once a GP has referred someone, but, as she says, some people wait longer. NHS England commissions the highly specialised pain management services for adults and children, and we will raise the issue with it. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has also published guidance for the pharmacological management of neuropathic pain, which includes CRPS. The guidance was updated earlier this year to reflect the latest available evidence.

Patients with CRPS will usually be managed through routine access to primary or secondary care. For patients with the most chronic and intractable pain, a referral can be made to a highly specialised pain service, commissioned by NHS England. Here, patients can receive multidisciplinary expert care and specialised treatment. Once diagnosed, patients can expect access to a range of other healthcare professionals for support and on-going treatment. This includes physiotherapists, occupational therapists, neurologists, a psychologist to help with the associated psychological problems caused by living with CRPS, and other healthcare professionals trained in pain relief.

The hon. Lady spoke about research. The National Institute for Health Research welcomes research funding applications for any aspect of human health, including CRPS. The CRPS UK clinical and research network was established in 2006. It is a research collaboration between a number of UK NHS trusts and academic institutions with an interest in the disorder. Its primary aim is to raise awareness and understanding among health professionals, patients and the general public. This year it is 10 years since the network established the CRPS registry, which now holds over 500 records and contributions and has contributed to seven different national and international research studies.

I thank the hon. Lady again for bringing this important debate to the House. I have attempted to answer as many of her questions as I can, but I will come back to her with anything that I have not covered. I hope that the debate has been helpful in raising the profile of this very difficult and distressing condition.

Question put and agreed to.

7.39 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 19 June 2018

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

UK-Romanian Relations

9.30 am

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered UK-Romanian relations.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Betts. I declare an interest, as I am the chairman of the all-party group for Romania. I welcome colleagues who were involved in a recent all-party group visit to Romania, and those who went there a couple of years ago under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Before I talk about the current situation, it is pertinent to review the relationship between our two great countries, which has existed for more than 100 years. Our diplomatic relations with Romania were established on 20 February 1880, but there was a considerable period, particularly during the second world war and the cold war, when relations were not as friendly as they currently are, so 1990 is considered to be the start of the modern UK-Romania relationship. Our relationship has grown stronger and stronger over the past 28 years. The United Kingdom was a firm supporter of Romania's joining NATO—I will say a bit more about that later—and the European Union, and we championed its calls to join both organisations. The strategic partnership that we currently enjoy was established in 2003.

Last summer, British troops undertook key exercises with Romania and other NATO allies in the Black sea region and the east of Romania. Our excellent ambassador, Paul Brummell, noted that it was the busiest period of activity in our bilateral defence engagement in recent memory. That demonstrates our shared history of defence and economic co-operation.

Our relationship is not limited to our diplomatic or economic relations. Prince Charles has a sprawling estate in Transylvania and visits Romania regularly—at least once a year. This year's visit coincided with our visit to Romania, and many of the key people met him and went to see his estate. The other great relationship is that Michael I, the last King of Romania, was a cousin of Prince Philip's, so we share a royal history. Colleagues perhaps do not know that Romania is home to virgin forests—forests that have not been explored or mapped, and which people have not gone through on trails—which could be opened up for conservation and tourism.

The all-party delegation visited Romania during the Whitsun recess. I was joined by the hon. Members for Keighley (John Grogan), for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) and for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), and we met many individuals from Romania, including the Deputy Prime Minister; Andrei Pop, the chair of the UK friendship group, who hosted us admirably during our brief visit; the vice president

of the Chamber of Deputies; the president of the Senate; the chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee; and the long-serving Foreign Minister, whose description of the UK-Romania relationship was a tour de force. We also had a key joint meeting with the European Affairs Committee and the Committee for Foreign Policy, and visited the Ministry for Romanians Abroad—and I shall come on to one of Romania's concerns about its citizens living abroad.

We were hosted by Angel Tîlvar and the foreign affairs counsellor to the President. We had a large number of diplomatic meetings. We also had the opportunity to have detailed discussions with the Ministry of National Defence and its cyber-security team. We saw many aspects of the work they are doing to combat the problems they face from Russia.

During our visit, six concerns were shared in almost every single meeting we had. Romania will ascend to the presidency of the European Council in January 2019, which is a crucial time for us as we leave the European Union, and is also the run-up to the European elections and the appointment of the new European Commission. All the Romanian politicians we met expressed the desire for a smooth Brexit. They have no desire to punish the United Kingdom for leaving the European Union, and they hope that our strong bilateral agreements on the policy areas we have collaborated on over the past 28 years will continue.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. On our relationships with Romania and other nation states, does he agree that, after we leave the EU next year, we can continue to build the type of relationship he is successfully and eloquently outlining with nations across Europe, irrespective of our or their EU membership? That would be very productive for both sides.

Bob Blackman: Clearly, an important part of the UK strategy is to form strong bilateral arrangements with our friends and neighbours from across the European Union. However, I am keen to highlight the importance of this particular strategic relationship, which existed long before Romania joined the European Union and NATO. It is clearly exposed to Russia, particularly in the Black sea region, and there are very important things that we have to be clear about in relation to that. All the people we met said that NATO must address the challenges from Russia in the Black sea region. The excellent document produced by the House of Commons Library strongly outlines the Russian threat to Romania and the concerns that Romania has expressed for many years about that issue.

All the people we met said they were concerned that young people from Romania are leaving the country to go to not only the United Kingdom but other parts of the European Union, denuding the country of its workforce and of people who can provide professional services. People who provide labour, and people who are highly intelligent and well qualified, are leaving Romania to go to other parts of the European Union.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): On that point about young people leaving Romania and going to other parts of the EU, including the UK, does he agree with me that over the next number of years, as the

[David Simpson]

Romanian economy strengthens and grows—it has been growing very well—young people will instead stay, which will cause staff difficulties in the agri-food sector in our part of the world?

Bob Blackman: I shall come on to the question of the number of people leaving Romania and coming to this country in a few moments, but the clear concern in Romania is that the young people who leave are not yet returning in any number. They may return in future, and it is true that in certain countries, such as Poland, people have started to return and to invest. A number of people who are resident in the UK are investing in Romania, but the concern in Romania is still about the huge numbers who are leaving and, at the moment, not returning, which puts a great strain on the country.

Romanians are also concerned about the trafficking of Romanian women and children through the European Union, including the UK. People are being trafficked for the sex trade and other illicit purposes, such as the drugs trade. Clearly that is of concern to the Ministry for Romanians Abroad, and it is one of those areas that we as a Parliament need to examine, to ensure that people who come here have chosen to do so of their own free will and accord to contribute directly to our economy, as so many do.

Equally, tourism and trade provide both a challenge and opportunity. Such opportunities will grow dramatically over the next few years. Indeed, the Deputy Prime Minister of Romania, whom we met on our trip, is married to a British businessman—who I happened to see last week when he was over here. They have been married for a long time. There are also clearly strong economic bilateral relations, all demonstrating the strength of support for the United Kingdom and Romania.

One or two aspects of modern Romania and what is happening there are probably not widely known. We visited a number of Jewish sites in Bucharest. One synagogue is being turned into a holocaust museum, to commemorate and recall the tragic events in Romania during the Nazi era. In Bucharest and Romania, people are facing up to the damage done during the Nazi era and in the holocaust and to the terrible number of people murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators.

We also went to a Hospices of Hope centre, not only to meet the people who run the hospice there but to see their work which, in essence, is with children suffering from life-limiting illnesses such as muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis. The centre is funded almost entirely by voluntary donations from the United Kingdom. It also looks into the terrible treatment of children under the communist regime.

We saw historical stained glass windows depicting figures such as Vlad the Impaler who, if legend is to be believed, was the model for Count Dracula. He had a nasty habit of literally impaling his victims and drinking their blood, so not something we would necessarily accord with in this Parliament—[*Interruption.*] Not necessarily, I said. I wanted to make sure that everyone was listening. We also saw the remarkable architecture of Bucharest. It used to be known as a modern-day Paris, blending neoclassical styles with modern design, including the remnants of communist-era buildings.

Another key feature worth noting is that every meeting we had on our visit was held in English. The Romanians spoke brilliant English, and they were most accommodating. In many of the countries that we have the opportunity to visit, politicians and diplomats all speak in their own language and have a translator. In Romania, every single meeting was conducted in English, demonstrating the modern Romania—and our inability to speak another language.

I warmly thank the UK ambassador to Romania, Paul Brummell, whose term of office comes to an end this August after a number of years. He will return to this country after an extremely successful time there. He is extremely well respected and clearly does a brilliant job for us. I also thank the Romanian ambassador to the UK, Dan Mihalache, who was with us for the whole visit. He has formed excellent relations in this country for Romania. Finally, David Webster acts as the APPG secretariat and was the trip organiser, and I thank him for all the arrangements that he made for us.

Last year the Office for National Statistics put the number of Romanians in the UK at 411,000, which was an increase of 25% in a single year. The Romanians have now overtaken the Irish and the Indians to become the second most populous non-British nationality in the UK. The most recent figures I have seen for 2018 indicate that that number has now topped 500,000. The Romanian population is therefore growing, while the Polish population, which was 908,000 in 2017, has apparently started to dip as Polish citizens choose to go back to their country of origin, as I said earlier.

Romania joined the European Union in 2007, and any restrictions on the movement of Romanians were lifted in 2014. In my constituency, we have approximately 10,000 Romanians, and every single week I see more than 100 more arrive to live in the constituency. They are young people who come to work here, not only to invest their own resources in our economy, but to earn money—contrary to popular myth, not to depend on benefits applied for in the UK. These people are equally at home in the building industry and our service industry. Notably in London, in any restaurant, café, car or shop we are likely to be served by a Romanian citizen who speaks excellent English and provides excellent customer service.

The bilateral relations that I alluded to earlier come about in a variety of ways. Prince Charles going to Romania annually gives us an enviable opportunity to use those connections. Equally, the Duke of Cambridge's cousin and the Romanian consulate recently set up in Scotland are other opportunities to enhance our soft power. In May, George Ciamba visited London. He was supposed to meet the all-party parliamentary group, but unfortunately that was not possible. I believe that he did meet our excellent Minister during his visit. He is a career diplomat, the Secretary of State for Political, Bilateral and Strategic Affairs in the Euro-Atlantic Area and, as such, leads for Romania on bilateral relations. Clearly, through him, we can build our soft power and the friendship that exists between our two countries. Furthermore, our excellent ambassador, Paul Brummell, and Andrew Noble, who replaces him in August, offer two more people with a shared relationship that can build soft power and improve understanding between our two great countries.

I mentioned the threat posed by Russia to Romania. Clearly, NATO and its members are expected to assist Romania against any and all Russian aggression. Reuters reported in February 2017 that a senior Russian official considered Romania's hosting of elements of an American anti-missile shield as a threat to Russia. Clearly, Russia takes the view that NATO establishments in Romania are a direct threat to it. It is quite clear from talking to people in Romania that Russian aggression is deliberately calculated to cause trouble. It has up to seven active submarines in the Black sea at any one time. Russia accuses NATO of encircling it through its operations in the area.

One of the concerns being expressed for the forthcoming NATO summit is that Russia's operations in the Black sea are not on the agenda. That is a concern to Romania. We need to send a strong message that NATO will not accept any position that threatens Romania or any other NATO ally. It is clear that in Romania's view the purpose is peace, not war, but we have to always be ready for the ultimate possibility. The exercises last year were helpful in demonstrating our capability to assist Romania in its possible time of need.

I mentioned that Romania takes the presidency of the European Council from January until June of next year. It has outlined its mission statement: to look at the conclusion of Brexit, hopefully an appropriate and smooth Brexit; to prepare the new multi-annual financial framework, which will be a key challenge for the budget; and to deal with the end of the current European Commission and Parliament and the build-up of the elections thereafter.

The centenary of the great union of Romania is on 1 December 2018. It marks the unification of Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina with the rest of the Romanian kingdom. The all-party parliamentary group will set up a stall in the Upper Waiting Hall in November, to educate MPs, their staff and any visitors on that significant event in Romania's history.

I would like the Minister to answer some questions. Firstly, what discussions are taking place between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its counterparts in Romania in preparation for the Romanian presidency? Secondly, what discussions are going on to develop the strong potential for bilateral arrangements post Brexit? Thirdly, what actions are the Government taking to ensure that Russian involvement in the Black sea is discussed at the NATO summit next month, and not sidelined as envisaged by the agenda? Fourthly, what action is being taken to combat child and other trafficking of Romanian citizens, in co-operation with the Ministry for Romanians Abroad? Fifthly, what arrangements are being made to develop trade relations and to support UK businesses in Romania? That is particularly important because many businesses that operate from the UK say that they would appreciate more help. Finally, what help is being given to develop tourism between our two great countries?

Thank you, Mr Betts, and colleagues for allowing me the time to speak. I hope we will have an interesting discussion and that we can develop the relationships between our two great countries, for the benefit of not only Romania but the United Kingdom.

9.53 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for setting the scene. In the main Chamber and across the House, he and I agree on a great many things. I am sure that on some things, we do not agree, but I have not found out what they are just yet. He takes forward issues that I am also concerned about. I am here to support him, but I also want to take the opportunity to speak about this issue, because a large proportion of my constituents are Romanian and I want to speak on their behalf.

Since I hail from a constituency with a thriving construction industry that employs a large number of EU nationals on sites—although nowhere near the scale of London—we have a job to do post Brexit to secure relations. We must reassure the Romanian nationals who have lived in my area for a great many years and those who are coming in great numbers. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) referred to the factories and the important employment in the agri-food sector. That sector is very strong in my constituency and I have those issues in my area, too. The agri-food sector employs a large number of people and adds to the economic life of Strangford, Northern Ireland and, as a result, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is important that we speak about these matters.

About a month ago I visited Romania for the first time. I had never been to Romania—before I became a Member of Parliament, I had been to very few places, to be honest. Being a Member of Parliament has given me the opportunity to enlarge my spectrum of knowledge of countries, which helps in this House. I was there to visit RAF's Operation Biloxi as part of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, to see how the RAF squadron operates within NATO. It is important to remember that Romania is one of our NATO colleagues—the hon. Gentleman referred to that in passing, but it is important to remember the relationship we have with Romania in that sense.

We all remember the revolution. I have never been to a museum anywhere in the world like the museum in Constanța, where a period of history has been excluded. Romania sided with Germany in the second world war, and it has blocked out that part of history, probably because it is embarrassing and something that they do not want to remember. We walked through its history to the beginning of the first world war, but then it was as if life stopped and restarted in 1944, when the communists beat the Germans and took the country back. Now it is a NATO ally. It is an important partner for us and we need to build our relationship from a defence point of view and make sure that the Romanian army, navy and air force are strong. Biloxi is important because there will be a new railhead, motorway and airfield, to make it a centre point for the distribution of NATO personnel. It is also not that far from Russia across the Black sea.

In the short time we were in Constanța, we had the opportunity to see some of Romania's great potential for tourism development. I hope that the Minister will look at that potential. Constanța has not been developed as it could be. It is ripe for development and construction. The possibilities are great there; the town has been run down over the years but it has potential. The railhead and road and airport contacts will make a difference. We met the very personable mayor of Constanța; he sells his city well. There is a lot of development in

[Jim Shannon]

Constanța, but they want more tourism contacts and links. We flew with Wizz Air, but Blue Sky also flies there and another company that I cannot remember. There is development, but there is potential for more. We should try to develop those contacts to a greater extent, for everyone's benefit.

Mr Campbell: On tourism and trade, does my hon. Friend agree that there is scope for two-way development between Romania and the UK, as well the other eastern European nation states, to build a closer relationship that will help as a bulwark against Russia, to build that two-way trade relationship and to help the economies in both nations?

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is right—the contact is two-way. The advantage for us is that we get labour coming over, and we also have contact through people going back. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland should invest in Romania. There is potential for investment, for development and for making money—investors want to make money on their projects.

Those are just some of the things I learned in my very short time in Romania. I was impressed by the people we met—by their kindness, their hospitality and their eagerness to be friends. We want to ensure that those relationships continue. The fact of the matter is that we had a great relationship with Romania before we were instrumental in bringing it into EU membership, and it appears to me that there is a desire to ensure that that relationship is protected and enhanced post-Brexit. It is my firm belief that where there is a will, there is a way. I often use that phrase—it probably comes from my mother—but it is very important today, as it was many years ago.

In 2016, the UK exported £1.8 billion of goods and services to Romania, and imports from Romania were £2.6 billion. The UK therefore had a trade deficit of around £800 million. Romania is an important trading partner, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) illustrated, that means we can do more to get the deficit back in balance. The deficit is due mainly to trade in goods; trade in services is broadly in balance. Romania is the 18th largest market in the EU for UK exports, and the 19th largest in terms of imports. I can well believe that Romania's will to continue that trade, in which it has the upper hand, will ensure that a way is found to do that, and that is my hope. The potential is there for all to see—we just need the will to make it happen.

I am pleased that we have such a good Library briefing for the debate. That briefing makes it clear that there are many reasons for the Romanians to stand up for a fair Brexit deal that enables us to keep working with them. In its most recent figures, the Office for National Statistics estimates that some 411,000 Romanians live in the United Kingdom, which means that they are the second largest non-British national group in the UK—I believe they are second only to the Poles. The ONS estimated in 2017, using figures from 2011, that 521 British citizens lived in Romania.

The migrant workforce from Romania has a significant role in the UK economy. More than one in six people working on house building sites across Britain comes

from another EU country, rising to half of site workers in London. A survey of some 37,000 house building workers across Britain showed that 17.7% were from the EU. More than half those are from Romania. Around 95% of the 29,000 seasonal workers who pick fruit in the United Kingdom are from the EU, with most coming from Bulgaria and Romania. According to Universities UK, 7,200 Romanian students were enrolled in programmes at UK universities in 2015-16, and a further 370 students are studying for UK degrees in Romania through transnational education provision.

Let me be clear: I do not cite any of those statistics to drag up the Brexit question. That question was put, the answer was received and the deal needs to be done. I do not need to defend Brexit—the nation backed it and we are going to move on—but I want to highlight the good relationship between our nations. That must continue post Brexit for the sake of both nations, and I very much look forward to ensuring that that happens.

Northern Ireland has a very strong link with Romania. In 2014, more than 1,400 Romanians registered for a medical card in Northern Ireland, compared with only 200 to 300 in each of the previous four years. National insurance number applications also increased in 2014: in 2012-13 there were just 268 applications from Romanians, but that figure rose to 972 and 2,424 in the following two years. That shows a clear trend of people coming from Romania to Northern Ireland, and specifically to Strangford. I am pleased to have them there working, co-operating, socialising, taking their children to school and very much being part of my cosmopolitan constituency.

In conclusion, Romanians should be able to continue to live and work in the United Kingdom provided they have a desire to, but let me say clearly that there is an onus on Romania to speak up in Europe to allow that relationship to continue. We always hear, with respect to Brexit, about the negotiations and discussions that take place about our position, but the other countries in Europe need us, too. Romania needs us, as do all the other 27 countries. We need the partners we already have in Europe to speak up for us, as we speak up for them. We want our relationship with Romania to continue beyond 31 March 2019. I believe that would be beneficial to both countries: to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—better together—and to Romania. We are better with them as well.

10.5 am

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is a fellow member of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. He made a typically extensive and interesting speech.

There are three reasons why I am delighted to take part in the debate, Mr Betts. The first is the fact that you, a fellow Yorkshireman, are in the Chair. The second is that today we are celebrating a great victory by an England squad with no fewer than seven Yorkshire-born members.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): And a Londoner scored both goals.

John Grogan: That is a minor detail, but yes.

The third reason is that the debate was secured by the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who led our delegation to Romania with great diplomacy and distinction. It was a good group—we had two

Scottish nationalists, one Labour Member and one Conservative Member. We were not quite representative of the nation, but he led us very ably and I learned a great deal from the visit.

I will not repeat the hon. Gentleman's remarks; instead, I will try to choose five reasons to be cheerful about Romania, building on what he said. The first is democracy. We stood on the balcony of the Interior Ministry one afternoon and looked out at the same view that Ceauşescu, the dictator, had less than 30 years ago, in 1989. How well Romanian democracy has developed in that time. My first encounter with Romania was a few years ago, when I was not an MP. I looked at Leeds civic hall on a Sunday morning and saw a massive queue of people. I thought, "What are they doing?" I asked some of them, and they were Romanians who wanted to vote. Some of them had been standing there for three or four hours. Romania generally has been a success in that period. While we were there, a new political party was formed. There is a lot of intense political debate—I will come back to that—and women are very well represented in Parliament. We met some very bright young people who no doubt have great political futures.

The second reason to be cheerful about Romania is its economy, which the hon. Gentleman touched on. The Romanian economy is racing ahead. The growth rate has touched 8%, and I think it will be more than 4% this year. Sectors such as motor vehicles, electrical goods and IT all have great futures, and Romania gets an awful lot of foreign investment. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the English. As one person we met suggested, the development of English has definitely happened in this generation. There are obviously many long-standing French links in Romania, but there has been an adjustment in the past generation. We had extensive debates with people from the British Council—youngsters and young adults—and they had excellent English. One of the older students suggested that that was because Romania has always had a tradition of not dubbing foreign films but subtitling them, and that that made some difference to the learning of English, even in communist times. The Romanian economy is definitely a success story, and the United Kingdom needs a slice of it.

The hon. Gentleman referred to foreign policy. Romania has a long tradition of having an independent foreign policy—that was the case even under the Soviet Union. Reference was made to our memorable dinner at a restored synagogue. Romania has a role to play in the middle east. I learned that not only is there a Palestinian population in Bucharest, but there are long-standing links with the state of Israel. Many Jewish citizens of Romania went to Israel—in fact, Ceauşescu even demanded payments from Israel—in the period of communism. There is still a strong, small Jewish community there, and that certainly brought home to me the need continually to fight anti-Semitism wherever we are.

We look forward to Romania taking the chair of the Council of Ministers. Without prolonging references to the European debate, I envisage that if by that stage the United Kingdom were suggesting that we might stay in the customs union or even the single market, the Romanian diplomats would find a way of bringing that about. They are certainly preparing well for their period in office—they were keen to tell us about the number of people they have in Brussels for that—and they will have many options for us, should we need them.

The hon. Gentleman, who mentioned tourism, spoke about the Black sea in the important context of security, but it is also important for tourism. Many cruise ships and holidaymakers now go to the Black sea. Romania is now the sixth largest producer of wine in Europe, and we had a little Romanian wine—just half a glass.

A final reason to be cheerful: today we are all thinking about sport. Sadly, Romanian football is not as good as it used to be. However, Mr Speaker is always keen to mention the No. 1 men's tennis player, and of course Simona Halep, the No. 1 women's tennis player, deserves a mention, having recently won the French open.

Finally, it would be remiss for the debate to go by without mentioning corruption in Romania. It was raised at many of our meetings, and not many of the politicians were comfortable speaking about it. However, I want to do so, not least because their current Government are a sister party of the Labour party. Incidentally, corruption affects all Romanian political parties. Without going into all the details of Romanian internal politics, the position of Ms Kövesi, the state prosecutor, is under threat, and the President must rule on her future soon.

It is not good enough just to talk, as some Romanian politicians do, about the deep state and how everyone is against them. Corruption must be dealt with. It is important for all the existing and new political parties that Romanian politicians of all parties confront the issue. The new, young generation of Romanian politicians, many of whom we were privileged to meet, must make it clear that even if such ways of operation happened in the past, they will not happen in the future.

10.12 am

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Mulțumesc, Mr Betts. May I say what a delight and pleasure this is? I am no national chauvinist, so you will not hear me banging on about the fact that both goals last night were scored by a Londoner, and you will not hear any of this Yorkshire chauvinism, even in reverse. What you will hear is my congratulations to my neighbour to the north—not the far north; barely north of Ealing—the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on bringing this important subject to the House.

We are fortunate in who we have on the Front Bench for the debate: not only my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood), who knows the subject very well indeed, but the Minister for Europe and the Americas, who is, if I may say so, one of the most impressive Foreign Office Ministers I have ever known. If I have one cavil against him it is that wherever I go, be it Belarus, Bucharest, Warsaw or anywhere, he will have been there before me and set a high bar. He will have set a standard for literacy, charm and intelligence that I can only aspire to. He represents our country extremely well, and we should be well aware of the pleasure of having him on the Front Bench.

May I cross swords with the hon. Member for Harrow East? When he spoke of the vast, untouched, untrodden forests of northern Romania as we approach the Carpathian foothills, where the wild boar and Balkan bear roam free and untrammelled, I thought to myself, "Some flipping travel agent somewhere will be noting this down and seeing it as an opportunity." Those of us who have entered the foothills of the Carpathians as the Romanian moon flies high in the dark sky, remembering

[Stephen Pound]

the great and glorious traditions of he who was known as Vlad Tepeş, will have looked around us and thought, “This really is the most glorious untrodden, unspoilt part of the world.” Is it any wonder that His Royal Highness Prince Charles feels so comfortable and at home there? Duchy Originals biscuits at 500 guineas a packet are fortunately absent, for which we can only be grateful. The food we were offered on my last visit to Romania was ample and delicious.

Can we, on the one hand, praise Romania and say what a marvellous country it is and, on the other hand, say, “let it not be ruined by tourism”? There is a balance to be had in what is happening in Constanţa on the Black sea coast, particularly with the cruise ships calling there. I was intrigued to hear that my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (John Grogan) enjoyed half a glass of wine. I suspect that it may have been a fairly large glass—do not forget that a glass can be any size, so half a glass could be a few gallons.

Romania is a wonderful country. In some ways, its past was cursed by its mineral wealth. Ploieşti has been mentioned, where some of the worst, most brutal fighting in the second world war took place, with some of the greatest losses. My friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke about Romania’s part in that war, and we should not forget that after the coup of Prince Michael they were our allies, fighting with us against a determined and well-entrenched Nazi force particularly concerned with protecting the oil fields. We should be grateful for that. In fact, the history of oil exploration in Europe and the middle east could not be written without recognition of the advances made in Romania, going back 1,000 years. Axle grease for chariots was mined in Romania and became a well-known product throughout the region. We should be aware of that.

We should note our relations and close links, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Harrow East. I visited the Hospice of Hope and thought what an extraordinary building it was. It was created initially by two Englishmen who saw what was happening with paediatric illness in the country and decided that something must be done, so they raised the money for the hospice, where no other similar hospice exists. It is a testament to the close links between us.

In some ways, Romania has not had the best of all presses, but there are many things to be proud of. Reference was made to Mr Speaker, whose family originally came from Romania, as well as to tennis players. I have been privileged to have stood on the battlements of the great noble towering castle of Braşov and looked out over the glories of northern Romania in the company of the man who in 1975 was simply the most exciting tennis player the world has ever seen. Of course, I speak of he who is now Senator Ilie Năstase. We may talk of Adrian Mutu during his time with a team who should not be mentioned from the other end of the Fulham Road, but no one can hold a racket to Ilie Năstase. What an extraordinary player. That he is now a senator says so much about modern Romania.

The other thing that struck me when I went to Romania was the language. The hon. Gentleman touched on this. Many Romanian words have an extraordinary resonance with us. For example, when someone in Romania says “goodbye” they say “la revedere.” For “good evening”

they say “bună seara”, and “good morning” is “bună dimineaţa.” I see the *Hansard* reporters looking a little worried. Phrases such as “la revedere,” so similar to the Italian “arrivederci”—“bună seara” is also similar to the Italian—show how Romania was such a crossroads between western Europe and the Black sea. In some ways, the country suffered from the constant tramp of military feet marching through, but equally it benefited in culture. It has an amazing music and theatrical tradition that has drawn from many sources to create a unique culture. Then there is the extraordinary language, so memorable and easy on the ear. It was right for the hon. Member for Harrow East to mention our ambassador, Paul Brummell, who is one of the finest representatives of our country, and has done very much for it.

Finally, let me address some misconceptions about Romania, which in some parts of the world—and some parts of the UK media—has had a bad press. I see the Romanian community in my constituency in a different light. I do not see a criminal confraternity or a group of people who are causing problems and difficulties for this country. I do not even see people who are unskilled labourers. Instead, I see IT professionals, doctors, dentists, cardiologists—people for whom we should be extremely grateful. I will not be drawn down the slippery slope into the ghastly foul nightmare of Brexit—it is too close to breakfast time even to talk about such horrors. However, we should be grateful that so many skilled and intelligent Romanians have done us the great favour of coming to work in our country.

If any Member would like to try some Romanian food, they should come to Ealing North. They should go straight past Harrow East—obviously, if they see a red light they should not stop; they should wind up the windows and come on down to Ealing North where they will find an extraordinary group of people who are industrious, hardworking, commercially astute and, if I may say so, an absolute credit to their country and my constituency. I am sure that other right hon. and hon. Members would say the same.

Romania is in some ways the victim of its past, which hangs heavy on the shoulders of that emerging nation. There are, however, many signs of hope, democracy and of a new, young and vibrant economy. One of the buildings of the Ceauşescu era had the second largest footprint on the face of the earth after the Pentagon. I remember asking what the planning permission was like, and what had been the consultation with the local community. How exactly did it manage to get built? Was there a proposal under a section 1 agreement? Was there a community infrastructure levy? I was looked at askance and they said, “Ceauşescu did not much bother with community consultation.”

We must consider that that is the recent past, and we spoke to people who had lived through that era. We have moved on from there to a young, hopeful, optimistic, forward-looking Romania, and it is so important that debates such as this take place. I do not wish to be otiose, but we must put on the record how we in this country appreciate, value and support our fellow Europeans in Romania, and hopefully we can work together and go forward. This debate will, I trust, put down a marker for future relations, and I look forward to hearing the Minister respond—indeed, there has never been a time in my parliamentary life when I have not looked forward to hearing the right hon. Gentleman. I know that in his

heart he has heard our words, and that he will feel the same emotion that we feel, which is a huge affection for Romania, the Romanian people, and above all, the Romanian future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Order. I now call the Front-Bench speakers. You have no more than 12 minutes each, because we need to allow time for the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) to respond to the debate.

10.23 am

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I will try to keep my remarks within that time, but perhaps you could allow me some leeway because I was one of the members of the all-party group for Romania who went on the trip, so I have a bit more to say than just summing up the debate.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I ask the hon. Gentleman to keep to the time limit, because it is the same for all the Front-Bench speakers.

Drew Hendry: I have made the request, and I will try to accede to your request, Mr Betts.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on securing this important and overdue debate on Romania, and the issues that affect it and its relationship with the UK. For a moment or two I wondered whether this debate was actually about last night's England-Tunisia game, but let me congratulate England on its win and then move on.

You will notice, Mr Betts, that in honour of this debate I am wearing a tie made from Romanian tartan. I must make a non-financial declaration of interest because since 2012, which predates my election to this House, I have served as honorary consul to Romania for the Highlands and Islands. It has been an absolute pleasure to do that on behalf of my Romanian constituents. Indeed, all hon. Members would find such a job easy, because just as it is the work of an MP to look after their constituents, so is it the work of an honorary consul to look after those people's interests—there is very little difference. On St Andrew's day last year, as a result of my work as honorary consul, I was awarded the rank of "cavaler" of the Romanian Republic, for which I was very grateful and honoured.

The hon. Member for Harrow East spoke about the trip of the all-party group, and the range of meetings and visits that we undertook. Brexit and security were common and recurring themes throughout our visit. People acknowledged that the UK had guided Romania through its accession to the EU, for which they were very grateful, but at every single meeting there was also an expression of sadness and some confusion about why the UK is leaving the EU. They also underlined how committed they are to the EU27 and to it continuing. As the British Romanian Chamber of Commerce said, people are looking for a human approach to Brexit, and in all our meetings we heard that they are keen on seeing an expansion of the EU. They also spoke again about the security threat from Russia, and the feeling that Russia is creating a buffer of influence using hybrid methods—political propaganda and military.

I commend the hon. Member for Harrow East for talking about the publicity that Romanian people get when they work in the nations of the UK. They are clearly not here to claim benefits, and statistics show that they are not causing any problems with crime. Indeed, statistically they are likely to behave better than our own indigenous citizens in the UK.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned the importance of Romanian workers in his constituency, and underlined the importance of the NATO relationship. As was pointed out, in fairness it is important to remember that Romania did change sides during the second world war, and it worked with Soviet forces to drive the Nazis back. I also echo the hon. Gentleman's remarks about opportunities for investment.

The hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan) spoke about five reasons to be cheerful, and gave a comprehensive list of some of the reasons for optimism that we should have for Romania. He spoke about his feelings regarding the change since 1989, and recalled standing on the balcony then—I will come back to that in a moment or two. He also underlined Romania's growing economy, which I will also return to shortly.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the joy of the British Council debates. They were probably the most fun that we had in Romania, working with students of all ages in the British Council, who were a delight to engage with. He rightly raised the issue of corruption and the need to challenge that at every level. Wherever corruption exists, and in whichever political system, it is the duty of all elected Members to raise the issue and point out measures that can be taken to tackle it.

Finally, in an enjoyable speech—well, they were all enjoyable—the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) tried to dampen the expectations of tourists by saying how beautiful, unspoiled and untrodden Romania is. He laboured on about how great the food and drink is, all to keep people from going there. He does not want Romania to be ruined by tourism, but he did a fabulous job of attracting people there, which I will try to emulate. The hon. Gentleman might be interested to know, with regard to the long relationship between Britain and Romania, that the Romans used Dacian—Romanian—troops to build Hadrian's wall; so it is a long connection.

Importantly, the hon. Member for Ealing North spoke, as did other Members, about the bad press given to Romanian people. Romanians in the UK have had a terrible time from the press here; they have been exploited for dramatic and grossly unfair headlines. As the hon. Gentleman said, we should take into account the fact that those people are doing us a favour by working here. We should all pause to think about that. Finally, the he talked about how exciting that new, young, hopeful and optimistic country was—those were very good words from the hon. Gentleman.

I want to talk about the visit by the all-party group. We visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and stood on the balcony over Revolution Square. It is an eerie feeling for someone who stands there to realise that they are in the place where Ceauşescu made the speech when his dictatorship exploded in real time. Footage can still be found on YouTube of that speech during which things disintegrated—from the orchestrated, disciplined crowd to the ludicrous concessions and promises to raise wages immediately by 20% because he could feel the crowd going away. It followed a pattern that happens when

[Drew Hendry]

people see the end coming. We see a leader who is paranoid and unable to trust anyone, disconnected from the people and famed for using wooden language, seeing their support disappear and desperately throwing out uncoded off-the-cuff promises and abandoning long-held strategies to try to stave off the inevitable—but let me get back to Ceauşescu.

How Romania has moved on. Its fast-growing economy has been mentioned. Real GDP growth is in the region of 78%, and the IT sector is undergoing a meteoric rise. It is now 9% to 10% of GDP, and it is so impressive that the London stock exchange is moving its back-office operation back into the EU from Sri Lanka. Romania is a nation of 22 million people with enormous potential for trade and the exchange of cultural ideas. As has been mentioned, the countryside is fabulously beautiful. The cities still bear the scars of the Soviet era, but they are rapidly improving. A lot of interesting development is going on, including in urban areas.

On a visit before I was elected to this House I went to Argeş county. I was struck by the similarities that I saw between the highlands and Argeş. I visited its folk museum and struggled to see the differences between it and the one in my constituency, so similar were they. I am delighted that High Life Highland will undertake an exchange visit this year with the folk museum, to discuss the opportunities for cultural exchange. As to opportunities for Scotland, clearly two sets of welcoming and engaging people are involved, and there are huge opportunities for the massive food and drink industries of Scotland and Romania. There are high-quality products, and opportunities to work together.

In the minute or so I have left I want to reflect on the pleasure of being able to work as the honorary consul in the Highlands and Islands. I thank Mihai Delcea, the Romanian consul general in Edinburgh, and the ambassador, Dan Mihalache, who has been mentioned in the debate, and who has been very supportive. Romanian Scots are well integrated and welcomed into our society. We are glad of them, and their contribution to modern Scotland, as we are of all people who come to work, and to add to our society. Given the shared history that we have with the people of Europe, including Romania, this is a special time to be saying that we appreciate both what they have done in coming to assist our economy and the relations we have with them.

10.35 am

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your stewardship, Mr Betts. I thank the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for bringing this important matter to our attention, particularly at this time. One thing that he said slightly perplexed me, and that was his notion of a smooth Brexit. I hope he means something constructive, and that he will vote for such a smooth Brexit in the Chamber when the matter comes before us again tomorrow, so that we will have some sort of accountability in Parliament on moving things forward. I look forward to walking into the same Lobby as the hon. Gentleman on that question.

The UK established its first diplomatic mission in Bucharest in 1803, 77 years before formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in,

as the hon. Member for Harrow East said, 1880. Also quite significantly we share royal blood, as Queen Marie of Romania was British by birth and the granddaughter of Queen Victoria; so there is a long historic relationship, certainly through the royal family, and I think that the UK wants a long working relationship. As was mentioned by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry)—it is quicker to call him the hon. Member for the rest of Scotland—Hadrian's wall was built by Dacian troops. Despite all that, his taking on the role of honorary consul shows what support there is for the people of Romania. The first and second world wars were mentioned, and the fact that Romania changed sides dampened the relationship somewhat; the cold war with Russia also created difficulties. Since those times, as has been said, our excellent ambassador Paul Brummell has done excellent work. He will move on in August, which is a shame, but that is what must happen in such posts. I am sure that he will be replaced by an equally brilliant ambassador, because we need to work with Romania.

The security issue, including in relation to Russia, has been mentioned a number of times. There is also a question of the relationship of Moldova and Romania and how, because of their shared history, the two need to work together. Of course, Moldova is not in the European Union at the moment, although it is striving to join—an issue that it is important for us to consider. We need to see how a bilateral relationship, and a continuing relationship between those two countries, can have a strengthening effect. The involvement of the Russian Army in Transnistria was mentioned. It is still there, so there must be a lot more work to resolve those security issues. Our role will be limited by leaving the EU, but it should not be a reason for us to stop working on the matter. It is all the more reason for us to continue our relationship, and our NATO commitment should allow us to go further in working together. It is hugely important to keep a relationship with Romania and strengthen our role in that regard. I think that in security terms, doing that will stand us in good stead in the region.

As to cultural exchanges, the British Council has done a phenomenal amount of work on cultural exchange for a long time—since 1938. It does good work across the world, and the relationships it builds through education are everlasting; there should be continued support for that.

The role of the Prince of Wales was mentioned, as was the fact that in Romania he has a foundation, which again is about education and supporting what we do. The best way of working with any country is through education. Talking about the role of education overall, I hope that we will allow more students to come in to the UK—qualified in proper universities—who want that sort of support to be able to move forward.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned the statistics from the Office for National Statistics. Those statistics are important because they show the number of people who are here, but also the types of work they do for us, and the types of support they give us, to move things forward. They play a huge and fundamental role. He also mentioned the role of the agricultural and seasonal workers who have come across. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has already mentioned the role those

seasonal workers play and the support they give. There is a question for the Minister later about how we support that industry to continue post Brexit and how we deal with that. It is extremely important for us to see how we move forward.

An increasing number of students are coming into our universities, which is very welcome as far as I am concerned. I believe the Government need to look closely at that, to see how we can support more students coming to this country. Our continued relationships will always exist if we have a better relationship through the education of people coming to this country, which will provide a much longer, deeper and further relationship in support of those combined countries working together.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), as always, was right in praising the Minister for his great work. The fulsome praise he gave is well deserved; the Minister is respected across both sides of the House for the work he does. I will not go into whether people should cross traffic lights when they are red. My hon. Friend's views on the great work done by the Romanian community, and the skills and support they provide to our country in doing it, are noted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (John Grogan) mentioned the significant issue of corruption. For a member of the European Union, corruption must be dealt with. It is extremely important that we do so, and we should work much more strongly on that; if we want to move forward with our relationship, it should be based on anti-corruption. It is crucial to work on that.

It has been an excellent debate, but I will just ask the Minister about the status of Romanians post-Brexit; the status of seasonal workers, whose support is much needed in this country; and also, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North said, the skilled people who come to support us in our hospitals, on our building and construction sites and on all the sites we have available. As I have already asked, what regional relationship will the Minister ensure with the heritage of Moldovans and the Romanians on security, with the 14th Brigade there? What further work can we do through NATO to secure that relationship and see that that is not in any way a flashpoint for further instability in that area? This has been a good debate, and I thank the hon. Member for Harrow East for securing it.

10.43 am

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for securing the debate, and for his hard work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Romania. I am grateful for the feedback on the all-party parliamentary group's visit to Bucharest last month from the hon. Members for Keighley (John Grogan), for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), two of whom have spoken today. I am grateful for the contributions of all hon. Members and I will try to respond to all the points raised.

I will say at the outset that I welcome this opportunity to illustrate the strength of the United Kingdom's relationship with Romania and our commitment to deepening our ties. I am still blushing from the kind words of the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen

Pound), slightly echoed, for which I am thankful, from the Opposition Front Bench. I sense that after the paean of praise from the hon. Member for Ealing North I owe him a sizeable bottle of Romanian wine—a magnum at the very least. We thank him for his special speech this morning on Romania. It was interesting, informative and entertaining, but most importantly it caught the flavour of our relationship with Romania, a sentiment that I think is shared by everyone participating in this debate.

The UK shares a close and long-standing partnership with Romania. Our diplomatic relations stretch back nearly 140 years, spanning two world wars and, most importantly, Romania's emergence from under the yoke of Communism. Today we have close connections at every level—Ministers, officials and parliamentarians. As we have heard, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales also makes regular visits to Romania, as the highly respected and popular patron of numerous charitable organisations in the country, and as someone who has property there and takes a deep interest in many aspects of the country's life. I was honoured to accompany him to the funeral of King Michael of Romania last December, joining friends from Romania and around the world to pay tribute to an extraordinary and distinguished monarch who stood up to both communism and fascism in his lifetime. The popularity of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was clearly evident from the warmth of the reception he received from the gathered crowds.

In recent years we have significantly strengthened our security co-operation with Romania to help to address threats in the region that are a concern for Romania and its neighbours. Last year was the busiest in recent memory for our defence engagement. The British military presence was seen on land, in the sea and in the air, and senior British representatives visited on a number of occasions. We plan to maintain that level of engagement in 2018 and beyond.

Last month, four RAF Typhoons returned to Romania to resume air policing activity, and the significantly named HMS Duncan docked at the port of Constanța for the second time this year. In fact, I have been following my Type 45 destroyer namesake around Europe for the best part of 18 months, but always seem to be two days behind or two days ahead. I look forward one day to coinciding with HMS Duncan; they probably have enough Duncan tartan on board, but I will think of something appropriate to give them when I board.

Our successful defence co-operation benefits both Romania and the United Kingdom. It also demonstrates the key role that the UK's world-class military and security capabilities continue to play in helping to protect our European neighbours. As the Prime Minister has made clear, our commitment to European security will remain steadfast and unconditional after we leave the European Union. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East that I am confident that Russia's activity will form part of the discussions at the NATO summit next month.

The same is true of our co-operation on law enforcement to tackle serious and organised crime. We have joint operations under way right now to tackle illegal immigration and financial crime. Combating modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking is a key focus of our work together. There are 16 active joint investigations in progress to tackle modern slavery, more than between

[*Sir Alan Duncan*]

any other two EU member states. We also share the hon. Member for Keighley's concerns about the maintenance of proper efforts to tackle corruption within the Government.

As an outward-looking nation, we also remain committed to supporting peace and security in the rest of the world. I take this opportunity to put on record my concern at recent suggestions by some Romanian politicians that their embassy in Israel might move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. We very much hope that Romania remains with the rest of the EU in believing that this would be unhelpful to the prospects for peace in the region; in any event, it is against the terms of United Nations Security Council resolution 478 of 1980 and others.

Our economic partnership with Romania continues to strengthen. Last year, direct British investment in Romania increased by more than £1.3 billion, and trade in goods between our two countries increased by nearly 5%. That is now worth £3.5 billion to the UK every year, while our trade in services is worth almost £1.8 billion. Again, to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East, we have a strong post-Brexit plan for bilateral trade.

Those security and economic ties are important and growing, but it is the daily interaction of our peoples that forms the bedrock of our relationship. Some 5,000 British people now live in Romania and make a positive contribution to the country they have made their home. Our charitable and educational links are particularly strong—numerous British charities make a real difference to the lives of individuals and communities—and this year the British Council celebrates 80 years of promoting education, language and culture in Romania.

Last month, the Office for National Statistics reported that Romanians are now the second largest group of foreign nationals in the UK, as we have heard. They are renowned for their hard work and entrepreneurship, and they make a hugely valuable contribution to our society and to every sector of our economy, be it finance, business, agriculture, engineering, healthcare or education. Many Romanians also choose to study at our universities; they are welcome here and we want them to stay. In the same spirit, we want to encourage greater tourism to Romania among UK citizens, but perhaps not for them to traipse through the virgin forests we have heard mentioned this morning.

Jim Shannon: The Mayor of Constanța said he would like to see more tourism contacts, particularly involving airlines. Does the Minister have any thoughts about how we can help him to achieve his goal and therefore, I believe, build greater economic ties between our two countries?

Sir Alan Duncan: I hope that in building the sort of bilateral relations that we want with all the EU27, we will see a cross-Whitehall approach to encouraging increased activity in all sorts of areas, including tourism. I very much hope that the afterlife, as it were, will deliver what the hon. Gentleman seeks.

In common with other EU citizens in the UK, Romanians want clarity on their rights after the UK leaves the European Union, which is why the Government

have made safeguarding citizens' rights a high priority in our negotiations. We are confident that the agreement we have now reached with the EU provides those citizens with the certainty that they need. Earlier this year, working closely with the Romanian embassy, the Foreign Office organised two widely publicised events, in London and Manchester, for the Romanian diaspora to explain the agreement reached on citizens' rights. We want to ensure that Romanians feel safe and welcome here, and we hope to run more such events in the future.

Looking to that future, particularly after Brexit, we are working with the Romanian Government to develop a new strategic partnership that looks far beyond March 2019. We welcome their commitment to our future relationship and look forward to strengthening our collaboration across a range of issues, including foreign policy, trade, security, culture, education and defence.

I was specifically asked if there have been any discussions about the coming Romanian EU presidency. I can tell hon. Members that we are already working closely with Romanian colleagues, and the British embassy in Bucharest has been discussing Romania's developing plans for the presidency with Government officials for some time now. On 8 June, Lord Callanan, the Minister of State for Exiting the EU, met the Romanian Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry for Romanians Abroad to discuss preparations for the presidency in the context of our exit from the EU. We also maintain excellent relations with the Romanian embassy in London, and we very much value and appreciate our working relationship and the attention it pays to us, which I sense is endorsed by all hon. Members here.

Many elements help to strengthen the partnership between the UK and Romania. The successful collaboration between our Government Departments, Ministers, parliamentarians and armed forces are all essential components of that good relationship. They are all underpinned and reinforced by the relationships between our peoples—the British citizens living in Romania and the Romanians living here, whose rights we are working hard to protect. We should be proud of the vibrant relationship between our two countries, which the Government, and I personally, intend to nurture and strengthen in the years ahead.

10.55 am

Bob Blackman: I thank every hon. Member who has participated in this welcome debate—particularly the Minister, who was widely praised even before he spoke. It is important that we send out a strong message to our citizens in the United Kingdom, to Romanian citizens in the United Kingdom and to our friends in Romania that we want a strong bilateral arrangement and relations going forward and that people who have chosen to come and live in our country are welcome. We congratulate and thank them for the service they give us and we want to make sure that they continue to contribute to our economy. Equally, we want to make sure that we stand shoulder to shoulder with Romania in our defence relations and, looking forward, in our trade relations and in tourism, even if that tourism is promoted by Pound Associates, that well-known travel agent in Ealing North.

It has been a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. We have had a warm and welcome debate, with speakers from across the nations of the United

Kingdom, which demonstrates the great force and the great opportunities around Romania. We are also grateful for those Romanian footballers who have come to our country, including, notably, two who came and played for Tottenham and demonstrated their great abilities on one or two occasions to overcome the other team that plays in north London.

It is a pleasure to sum up the debate, and I look forward to the various activities in the rest of the year to promote the excellent relations between our two countries. We can look forward to a solid future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK-Romanian relations.

Rail Services: Hassocks

10.58 am

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered rail services in Hassocks.

I welcome the opportunity to raise the subject of the rail services provided for villagers in Hassocks in my constituency, and for others who use the station there, which is on the Brighton main line and which offers Southern, Thameslink and Gatwick Express services. Hon. Members may wonder why I am talking about rail services to a village. Although it has a population of only 7,700 people—making it the largest settlement in my constituency—Hassocks is nevertheless the 10th busiest rail station in west Sussex and is used by many people who do not live in Hassocks itself. It is a commuter village.

Many people move to Hassocks specifically because of the rail links that it provides to London and other places. In fact, 1.3 million passengers a year use Hassocks station. Therefore, my first and key point—I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has taken it on board, because he very generously met me to discuss this issue before the new timetable was introduced last month—is that this is not a small issue. A large number of people use the rail service from Hassocks in my constituency, and the Minister knows that they are very angry indeed. They have put up with two years of disruption because of the problems with the Southern service and the London Bridge upgrade. They fully accept that the London Bridge upgrade will ultimately be of benefit to passengers, but they are certainly not seeing that at the moment. Just as it looked as though we might be moving towards a steadier state for rail services in West Sussex, which over the past two years have been absolutely dismal, we have serious disruption again.

This all started with the introduction of the new timetable last month. I should say straightaway that I fully appreciate that the new timetable provides more peak trains to Victoria from Hassocks and the same number to and from London Bridge—theoretically; I will come to the actuality shortly. Theoretically there are more such services, but—here is the “but”—there are no longer any direct services to Clapham Junction, the busiest rail station in Europe, from Hassocks. Despite the size of the village and the numbers of people commuting from there, the direct services to Clapham Junction have simply been withdrawn, and I am talking not about the disrupted timetable, but about the new timetable, which was meant to offer an improved service to everyone.

Four peak-time morning trains to Clapham Junction have been removed, and Govia Thameslink Railway admits that three of those journeys will now be slower by up to 10 minutes because of the need for my constituents to change services. Six peak-time return trains from Clapham Junction to Hassocks have been removed, and GTR admits that four of the journeys will be slower by up to 10 minutes. GTR has told me that it appreciates that

“passengers will need to change trains,”

but

“the journey time is only increasing by an average of 7 minutes.”

[Nick Herbert]

Commuters dispute that: they say that changes at Gatwick or East Croydon are rarely quick or easy, because of overcrowding. I know that GTR is giving figures based on a four-minute change time at Gatwick. I defy the Minister, GTR executives or anyone else reliably to be able to change at Gatwick at peak time, even if the trains were operating properly, based on only a four-minute window.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for the work that he is doing. Many of us in West Sussex are working together on this; it is a huge problem across the county. On his particular point about a changeover time of four minutes and with crowded platforms and mass disruption, commuters in my constituency are very concerned about the safety aspect. I am sure that that is a concern for his commuters as well.

Nick Herbert: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. We have indeed been working together in West Sussex and we have been working closely with our right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who is also very concerned about the disruption to services on the line. We are all concerned about the unfeasible interchange times and the safety implications, the implications for disabled passengers and so on. It is no good producing figures that show a theoretical benefit or not much of a change or not much of a problem for commuters, because of course it is actually very disruptive for people to have to change when they had a direct service before. These are busy working people. They often cannot get a seat once when they have changed. Their working patterns are disrupted, and they are just very irritated by the claim that somehow the service is nearly as good as it was before. It really is not.

There is a mismatch between demand and train routes. Gatwick Express trains, which stop only at Victoria, are relatively empty, whereas Thameslink trains have been severely overcrowded. I have raised before with the Minister whether it makes sense for Gatwick Express trains not to stop at the busiest station in Europe, Clapham Junction. If they did, that would offer more choice to people flying to and from Gatwick. The demand that those trains run direct from Gatwick to Victoria is problematic anyway, but it is certainly disadvantaging my constituents at the moment.

The Minister will tell me that only 9% of journeys in relation to Hassocks are to, from or through Clapham Junction. It sounds like very few when we hear that only 9% of my commuting constituents are affected, but actually it is 9% of a large number. It is 9.45%, to be precise, of the nearly 595,000 journeys that are being made to London. That means that more than 56,000 single journeys a year from Hassocks to Clapham Junction, in either direction, have now been withdrawn, in terms of the direct service, so that is not a small impact. It is impacting on the village, and people are very upset about it. Hassocks is a growing village—the number of houses will increase by one third in Hassocks alone, never mind the surrounding area—so to pick on one of the biggest stations in West Sussex and withdraw entirely the direct service to Clapham Junction simply does not make sense. I would therefore be very grateful if I could

repeat to the Minister the request that I have made to him, to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to GTR and to Network Rail, in so far as it is a matter for that organisation: will they please reconsider the new timetable, which has withdrawn what was an essential service for a large number of my constituents?

All this would be one thing, and I might not even have raised it in this Chamber, if it were not for the fact that these are theoretical new services anyway, because the disruption that has resulted from the new timetable has worsened the service not just for the commuters who have seen their service withdrawn, but for hundreds—no, thousands—of others. Frankly, the service since the introduction of the new timetable has been completely intolerable. I said at the beginning of the debate that my constituents were angry about it—they really are angry. This disruption is happening on a daily basis. It is deeply ironic that before the new timetable was introduced, GTR told me:

“We hope that with the introduction of this timetable, we will be in a position to provide...much more reliable services for all passengers travelling on our network.”

That would produce a very hollow laugh indeed from my constituents. The Minister knows that there has been widespread withdrawal, cancellation and delay of services.

The important thing for the Minister to note is that the situation is not getting better; in fact, it is just as bad as it was when the new timetable was first introduced. In the week before the timetable change, to 19 May, there were 18 train cancellations. That was a “normal” service. “Normal” service in West Sussex appeared to mean that my commuters had to accept that level of cancellations. Can people imagine an airline being run on the same basis? But never mind; there were “just” 18 cancellations in that week. In the first week of the new timetable, 245 trains were cancelled, and I am talking about trains to and from Hassocks. In the second week, there were 267 cancellations, in the third week 312 and in the fourth week 290. We are now in the fifth week and still nearly 300 trains a week are being cancelled. Might we have expected that after one month of the new interim timetable, which is resulting in services being withdrawn altogether, there might be some improvement? I am afraid not.

On Monday morning I received an email from a despairing constituent, Mr James Read, who lives in Hurstpierpoint. He said:

“I feel I must write to express my dismay at the current situation which appears to somehow deteriorate further everyday. This morning for example, I have never seen so many people waiting for a London train on the platforms at Hassocks. This morning, the 0623 was virtually full before it reached Hassocks. Then there were additional stops at Hayward's Heath and Three Bridges to compound matters. It is totally unacceptable for people to be standing on a train service at 0630!”

I agree with that. I have a simple question for the Minister: when will this shambles come to an end? We are now four weeks on and it continues to be appalling.

I have here a timetable for rail services from Brighton and Hassocks in 1905, well over a century ago. The fastest of three direct trains from Hassocks to London Bridge took just one hour and 17 minutes. Those were steam trains. Theoretically, we now have direct services from Hassocks to London Bridge that are 23 minutes faster, but the reality is that we have a completely

unreliable service. My constituents would be grateful to be transported back to the days of 1905, when they had three reliable steam trains that took them to London every single morning, compared to the chaotic, shambolic, disrupted, withdrawn and cancelled services that they are facing now.

What will be done about this? There is the issue of redress. I am grateful to GTR for at last recognising that tickets that are valid on one of the services should be passported to the others. I specifically asked for that and am grateful that it has been introduced. If a passenger has a ticket for a Southern service that is cancelled, they should be allowed to use it on a Thameslink or Gatwick Express service, or whichever service is available.

Then there is the issue of compensation. Of course, we must compensate passengers, but the compensation system is simply not good enough. It is not direct enough, immediate enough or sharp enough. It is too complicated for constituents to use. It just increases their irritation even more. We need a modern, sharper form of compensation system that is better than delay repay, so that the rail operating companies feel real pain when they are providing a shambolic and shoddy service like this, and passengers are compensated on a much more immediate basis. We need that not just because it would be fair to customers, but because it would introduce greater accountability.

Who will be accountable for this shambles? We have seen the resignation of Charles Horton, the chief executive of GTR, but what about Network Rail's responsibility for this matter? It has admitted that it has some responsibility for the problems with Thameslink services, because of its failure to deliver in the north, which meant that it did not have enough staff to manage the new timetable. GTR says that one of the reasons it was in such trouble is that it was not given enough time to introduce the new timetable. The blame game is being played a lot. Who is being held accountable at Network Rail for this shambles? Yes, other projects may have been delivered on time and London Bridge might be wonderful, but that is not the point. My constituents want to know that people are being held accountable for these problems, so that they will not happen again.

Those were unforced errors, frankly. This is not the same situation as we are seeing in the north with union disruption. It is not the same as the situation over the last two years with the disruption to Southern services, which, we all came to realise, were largely driven by the unions manipulating problems that already existed with the lack of track because of the London Bridge upgrade and the shortage of drivers. There were other responsibilities, but the unions were driving it particularly. That is not the case with these Thameslink services now. We cannot lay the blame at the door of the unions for this. The blame has to be laid with the managers, whether in Network Rail, GTR or the Department for Transport, who presided over this shambles.

Why was there not an early warning system or risk register? Why were red lights not flashing, because this was a major change and could result in problems? We were still being told right up to the introduction of the new timetable that it might have minor teething problems, but it would be all right on the night. I am afraid it has not been all right on the night. We have to learn the lessons. I know that there will be an inquiry into that.

I am being placed—as my hon. Friends are—in a position where we are constantly having to apologise for the performance of the rail industry in our constituencies. It is difficult to explain to our constituents why more drastic action has not been taken to deal with this franchise.

Jeremy Quin: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He is making a speech of great passion and he is spot on with every point. As he knows, we are facing the same issue in Balcombe. I have discussed it with the Minister before. Balcombe is a small village with a huge number of commuters who come into it. They pay a fortune every year in order to get to and from London. The least they can expect is to be able to do so reliably.

I like my right hon. Friend's tone. Does he agree that an inquiry is one thing, but we simply need to know when these drivers will be trained and when the timetable will be working? Those are two simple questions, to which we need to have the answers as soon as they can be provided.

Nick Herbert: I agree with my hon. Friend. He has made the point directly, and I am sure the Minister will have heard it.

We will have to look at the size of this franchise again. It is too big. It was meant to deliver benefits in economies of scale, but it has only given us problems from the moment that it was introduced. We also need to look at the franchise holder. I appreciate that that is a legal process, but my constituents cannot understand why GTR is still running this franchise. There are longer term questions about the level of investment necessary in these lines. Hon. Members representing West Sussex constituencies will be very supportive of an increased level of investment, but that does not deal with the short-term issues.

In conclusion, my constituents in Hassocks are paying in excess of £5,000 a year for their season tickets. They rely on these rail services. I would, therefore, be grateful if the Minister would, first, look again at the question of whether direct services to Clapham Junction from Hassocks can be restored and, secondly, if he can tell us when normal, reliable services are likely to be restored.

I am grateful to the Minister for his attention to these problems, and I know how hard he has been working on them. His door has been open to us, and he has been receptive to the points we have been making. I certainly attach no blame to him or his colleagues. He has been badly let down indeed. I am sorry to address him in such tones, but it is important that I do so, because it is important for him to understand just how angry our constituents are now about this perpetually bad service and how despairing they are that there seems to be no end to it. They just want a normal, reliable rail service. In the 21st century, is that really too much to ask?

11.17 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), who, as we have just seen, is an extraordinarily powerful champion for his constituents, on securing this important debate on rail services in Hassocks. At the outset, I

[Joseph Johnson]

assure him that it is the Department's No. 1 priority to ensure that his constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) get the rail services to which they have every right to feel entitled as soon as possible.

He is under the impression that services have not been improving in recent days. I am disappointed to hear that. I will look into the statistics and the picture he painted of performance to and from Hassocks. Passengers travelling on those services already should have started to see improvement in their performance since GTR started cancelling services in advance, rather than on the day.

During the week beginning 28 May—some time ago now—there were several days with just three morning services from Hassocks to London Bridge. The other scheduled services were cancelled on the day, meaning that passengers could not plan ahead. Last week, by contrast, there were no on-the-day cancellations and five services ran in each morning peak period. I grant that performance is still far from being at the level that my right hon. Friend or we in the Department would find satisfactory, but I hope that passengers seeing that change feel that improvement is starting to happen. It must now accelerate and that is the priority for the Department.

On the Hassocks to Victoria route there are still too many delays. I should add that in the morning peak last week, 12 services ran each day, compared with the seven scheduled services before the timetable change. Even if there is much more room for improvement on the Victoria line, even there we are starting to see things move in the right direction.

Network Rail and GTR are urgently developing and delivering plans to do more to reduce the disruption, and to give passengers the greatest possible certainty of train services so that they can better plan ahead. As I have mentioned, GTR is removing services from its timetable in advance, rather than on the day, and reducing weekend services to pre-May timetable levels. It is now updating journey plans on Fridays with the information about which services are being cancelled for the following week being all loaded up there and then, so that passengers can get a sense of what the travel patterns will be like for the coming week. That should bring about a more stable service than we have seen in recent weeks and will be in place, to answer my right hon. Friend's question, until a full replanning of driver resourcing can take place. GTR also aims to publish an amended timetable across the whole network. Once that is in place, the promised improvements of the May timetable will be introduced incrementally, rather than as a big bang, to reduce the risk of further disruption.

Let me turn to the questions about the future timetable, once we are over this difficult period of disruptions following the implementation of the timetable. When it is fully implemented, the new timetable will deliver improvements to as many passengers as possible while balancing the competing and often contradictory demands of different passenger groups.

As my right hon. Friend noted, peak-time services from Hassocks no longer stop at Clapham Junction. That is because all peak services between Hassocks and Victoria are Gatwick Express trains coming from Brighton,

which cannot stop between Gatwick airport and Victoria. However, there can be a single change at Gatwick airport. We can examine his view that a four-minute positive interchange was an unrealistic ambition; I will certainly go back to Network Rail and GTR to see whether four minutes is a realistic interchange time. However, if we assume for a moment that it is possible to interchange in that time, Hassocks passengers can make the journey to Clapham Junction with an average journey time that is roughly the same as before the timetable change, with some journeys being faster and, I grant, with some being slower.

It may be helpful if I explain the reasons behind the change. Since the end of the industrial action to which my right hon. Friend referred in his remarks, the main cause of disruption on the Southern network has been trains and train staff travelling on different lines during the day. That has meant that when disruption has occurred, it has often spread rapidly across the network because if a driver or a train were caught up in disruption on one route that can impact very quickly on their availability for the route on which they are next meant to be working.

The new timetable keeps trains and train staff working on the same route throughout the day, containing any disruption on that specific route. In addition, work has been done so that the timing of services does not conflict with that of other services on the network. This work has included separating Gatwick Express services and Southern services on the Brighton main line.

The net result is that Hassocks now receives a consistent four Gatwick Express trains per hour on the route from Brighton to Victoria during the peak, and two Southern trains per hour from Littlehampton during the off-peak. Previously, as my right hon. Friend knows, Hassocks was served by a combination of Southern and Gatwick Express services coming from Brighton or Littlehampton at all times.

I appreciate my right hon. Friend's point that a considerable number of passengers are still being affected, but I believe that they are now in a position where they are able to choose between Southern and Gatwick Express services. Passengers from Hassocks will benefit from the performance benefits that will come in time from the full separation of Gatwick Express and Southern services.

I also emphasise that the vast majority of passengers travelling to London from Hassocks are being well served by the timetable change. None the less, I recognise that 9.45%, or somewhere under 10%, of weekday journeys represents a significant number of my right hon. Friend's constituents who use services from Hassocks. However, it is also worth remembering that more than 90% of passengers using Hassocks are going to Victoria or are on Thameslink services. Overall, connections from Hassocks into London are much improved.

Hassocks now receives 12 direct services to Victoria in the morning peak, compared with seven before the timetable change. This provides a significant capacity increase for those passengers going to Victoria. As this is a Gatwick Express route during the peaks, it is run with new trains that have air conditioning, wi-fi and power sockets. On average, the journey from Hassocks to Victoria in the morning used to take more than an hour. Now it takes, on average, 51 minutes, which is

significantly better than the amount of time that services took in 1905, the timetable for which my right hon. Friend produced and referred to.

Nick Herbert: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Before he experiences the fate of politicians and other public figures in Sussex who have particularly infuriated us and is burnt in effigy, may I ask him to reconsider his comment that services are “much improved”? I think what he meant was that they might be much improved when the new timetable is finally introduced and works properly, but he cannot say, and nobody can say, that the current level of service is much improved.

Joseph Johnson: Indeed. I prefaced all my comments by saying that this was about what would happen once we are over this hump—the current difficulties—and once the timetable is fully bedded in and working to the levels that it should. Of course my right hon. Friend is right and I repeat what I said earlier: there has been improvement, as I hope he acknowledges, but there is significant room for further improvement, so that services are of the standard that his constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham have a right to expect.

On average, the journey times for trains into Victoria from Hassocks will be reduced by 10 minutes in the morning, when the service is operating at the level it should be operating at.

Jeremy Quin: I appreciate that there is an ongoing inquiry. Will my hon. Friend confirm whether this situation is attributable purely to the retraining of the drivers, so that when that training is concluded the new timetable will operate properly, or are there other issues to be got to grips with as well? As I say, I appreciate that there is an inquiry ongoing, but I would be most grateful for any light that he can throw on this situation.

Joseph Johnson: Yes, the sheer magnitude of the timetable change affecting GTR, which is one of the biggest changes that the railway industry has ever seen, and the late delivery of the timetable as a consequence have meant that GTR was substantially behind where it should have been on driver training and on getting in place all the appropriate train diagrams. That driver training and reorganisation work, which should have been completed in time for 20 May, is now being done at pace. Once that has worked its way through, we anticipate being able to move progressively back to the full May timetable.

There are the same number of services going from Hassocks to London Bridge as there were before the timetable change. I grant that for a temporary period Hassocks will receive fewer peak services to Blackfriars compared with the situation before the timetable change. However, that is a temporary result of the rephasing of the timetable and this route will receive an extra service each hour from December this year. Average journey times to Blackfriars and London Bridge are now between five and 10 minutes shorter than before, providing passengers with quicker direct access to London Bridge, Blackfriars, the City, Farringdon and St Pancras.

The new Thameslink service also offers passengers different options for getting to their final station. For example, people who interchange at Clapham Junction for Waterloo will instead be able to interchange at London Bridge for Waterloo East. The opening of the Elizabeth line through Farringdon in December will offer further journey opportunities.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs mentioned compensation. As ever, passengers are encouraged to apply to their train operator for delay repay compensation for affected journeys. We are seeing increased take-up of that compensation, as awareness of it and the ease with which people can access it grow. We have also announced a special compensation scheme for GTR passengers. It is to be funded by the rail industry and it will ensure that regular rail customers receive appropriate redress for the disruption they have experienced. I encourage passengers to apply to GTR for delay repay compensation. GTR operates the scheme for all of its passengers and under it passengers can claim compensation for each delay of more than 15 minutes, whatever the cause of the delay.

I conclude by thanking my right hon. Friend for bringing this subject to Westminster Hall. It is an important subject and it is absolutely right that his constituents get the services they deserve as rapidly as possible. I remind the House that in time the vast majority of passengers will end up being well served by this timetable change, once it has bedded in. Those travelling to Victoria from Hassocks will have an extra five additional services during the morning peak; for those travelling on Thameslink, journey times will be between five and 10 minutes quicker than before. In time, I hope that he will agree that rail services into Hassocks will be much improved once those services are fully bedded in.

11.30 am

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Geothermal Energy

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Before I call Helen Goodman, let me say that Members may, in view of the Ascot weather, remove items of clothing as they deem appropriate.

2.30 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the potential for geothermal energy resources in the UK.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Evans. I am pleased to have the opportunity to open this debate on what is a huge carbon-free energy resource for this country. I hope we can use the debate to highlight the potential of the resource and to encourage the Minister to act, so that we fully realise the opportunities.

In Britain, geothermal energy comes in two forms: that which occurs naturally in the geological structure in some places, and that in old mine workings. I first became aware of that when I was a trustee of Auckland castle, which sits on the Butterknowle fault. At that time, the trustees looked—I understand they are still looking—at the possibility of using the geothermal energy there to heat the castle, and perhaps for a district heating scheme.

The Butterknowle fault runs across my constituency. It is a geological feature where coal was mined from the time of the Romans to the mid-20th century. Now the coal is exhausted but scope for geothermal has been discovered. At a depth of 500 metres, the heat is 30° C, and at 1.5 km there are rocks of about 73° C. It would be really good to exploit that, particularly because some of the villages on the fault—Evenwood and Cockfield—are off the gas grid, meaning that fuel bills and, in turn, fuel poverty are high. I met a woman whose winter oil bill one year was £3,000. I know that such a system exists in Southampton, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), who was the leader of the council there when the project began—indeed, I think he was instrumental in beginning it—will tell us more in his Front-Bench speech about how that works. Maps show that there are considerable areas of the country where it is a possible source of energy.

The second kind of geothermal energy we have is warm water in old mine workings. At about 30° C, the water is generally not so hot, but it is nearer the surface and therefore easier to extract. The Coal Authority has completed maps of 23,000 former collieries and has a very good understanding of the geology, the engineering and the feasibility of such schemes. The former mine workings are treated as a £3 billion liability for British taxpayers, because they must be kept safe, but they could be turned into a massive stream of income for them instead. Durham University's Durham Energy Institute, in particular Dr Charlotte Adams and Professor Jon Gluyas, has done, and continues to do, a lot of work on this, and it has shown that the scale of the resource is phenomenal. Currently in this country, 80% of people heat their homes with gas. Durham University

believes that the deep geothermal—the geological—could provide 100 GW of power, which is 16% of the electricity we consume.

Turning to the mine workings, a quarter of homes in this country sit on the old coalfields—7 million homes that could use mine-water heat instead of gas. In business terms, that represents a business or a sector with an annual turnover of about £2.5 billion and profits of £250 million. The net present value of the resource is £72 billion—I am using these numbers because I know that the Minister is financially literate and will understand their significance—and the net present value of the profits is £7.2 billion, so the Minister should look to turn the current £3 billion liability into a £72 billion asset.

Furthermore, the heat source is virtually carbon-free. It is estimated that enabling a quarter of the homes in this country to move over to it would save between 10 and 15 million tonnes of carbon a year. The current warm water would supply heat for 100 years, but if pumping technology were introduced to recycle the heat, that period could be extended almost indefinitely. I am told that by Durham University, which says that to meet our next carbon budget, it is essential to decarbonise heat. The Government's current strategy is to do that by shifting people from gas to electricity heating, but electricity generation is only about 35% efficient, whereas I understand that for geothermal the figure is 75% or 80%, so the loss during production, transmission and distribution is much less. Geothermal would, therefore, be a much better route to pursue to hit our carbon targets. Some 40% of our carbon emissions are produced by fuel for heating, so if we decarbonised a quarter of the country there would be a reduction in our carbon emissions of 10%. That would be fantastic. It represents a really large reduction that is really worth having, and it would give us more flexibility in other areas of life.

There are considerable other policy advantages of using the mines in this way. First, this source of energy would improve energy security. Geothermal energy is not intermittent, unlike wind and solar, and it would reduce our dependency on unstable foreign regimes.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I do not know if my hon. Friend sees Iceland as an unstable foreign regime, but another idea is to have an interconnector through to that country, which gains enormous power from geothermal energy. Would my hon. Friend say that that fits into her debate in some way?

Helen Goodman: My hon. Friend has just inserted it into the debate, so it obviously fits. Yes, that is a country that is already using the resource, as are others, and I will come on to that in a moment.

As I said at the outset, there is significant fuel poverty in some parts of the country and using geothermal energy is a way of tackling that. The sector could also be a source of jobs, especially in the former coalfield communities, which still suffer economic decline and need regeneration—in 2004, the Department of Trade and Industry estimated that it could create a million jobs. That is a very big number, and it might not be as many as that. If we compare it, however, with the 300,000 jobs in the oil and gas sector, we can see that it is obviously a significant number of jobs. Moreover, the skills and supply chains used in the oil and gas sector

would be similar to what is required for geothermal. It would provide a useful transition for those businesses as the North sea declines.

Fourthly, geothermal could help to improve food security. That warm water would facilitate horticulture in parts of the country where it does not currently exist. Fifthly, mines can be used to store heat and therefore to balance power across the grid. We would be developing an industry that could be a source of exports. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) suggests importing heat from Iceland. I do not know whether an interconnector across the very deep waters of the north Atlantic is feasible, but I know that in many areas of renewables, this country has done a lot of innovation and research and then not seen through the development. In the case of wind, we did a lot of the basic science and initial work, but the industry has flourished more in Denmark, Norway and Germany than it has here. We must stop making that mistake. We need a different approach for geothermal, because we could be exporting engineering services for geothermal.

Another advantage is that there is no nuclear waste with geothermal, which compares well with some of the other power projects being promoted. It also does not produce the environmental damage that fracking produces, yet in the Government's 160-page clean growth strategy, there is not a mention of geothermal. I want to understand why that is. The strategy says that the Government wish to ensure that they can

"deliver affordable energy for households...decarbonising 'harder to reach' parts of the UK economy",

particularly heating. The strategy says that it is important to have "concerted joined up working" across Departments. It wants to see innovation to minimise costs. I agree with all those things, and geothermal is a policy area where they could be put into practice.

I know the Minister well. When she puts her mind to something, she is a very effective operator. She is a formidable figure. Officials in her Department have told me that they have found her leadership on renewables inspirational. I know she is not a paper shuffler. I want her to pick up the baton and run with it, because I have confidence that if she wanted to, she could make a difference here. The time to do that is now, using the skills and know-how of the petroleum industry. I am going to give her a few practical suggestions as to what I would expect to see in a policy for geothermal.

First, the basic science is strong, but we need more demonstration projects. The Coal Authority needs more resources to do those, as well as to provide advice for commercial actors.

Secondly, in the medium term we should probably have regulation and a licensing system that would bring in money for the taxpayer. For now, it would be sensible to extend the contract for difference to heat. At the moment, it operates just for electricity. In the Netherlands, the Government introduced a form of risk insurance. In five years, the scale of their geothermal sector has doubled.

Thirdly and finally, my concern is that we should see reform to planning and building regulations. The resource is being lost and opportunities are being wasted. One of the studies that Durham University did was into some old mine workings in Spennymoor in my constituency. It found that it would be feasible to have a district

heating system for a new development of 300 houses. The local authority had no powers to require the house builder to consider, let alone implement, sustainability factors or renewable energy sources.

We all know that the large national house builders want to minimise risk and maximise profits, which, on being interpreted, means that they are lazy and greedy. They are not going to innovate unless they are required to do so. It has been suggested to me that we need a return to code 6 for sustainable homes. That gave us targets for achieving carbon neutrality in house building. Just as with the transition from oil and gas, the time to reform the building regulations is now. We are trying to build a lot of houses, so now is the time to raise the standards.

Everybody knows that retrofitting is more costly, so this is the moment to raise the quality of the housing stock for the next 100 years. We are in danger of making exactly the same mistake that was made after world war two, when a lot of prefabricated buildings were built. If we are going to build a lot, we need to build high-quality buildings for the long term, not the slums of the future. I suggest to the Minister that she organises a seminar for the national house builders and experts in the field to educate them. Will she write to or meet her colleague, the Minister for Housing, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), to persuade him that he needs to incorporate the changes into the building regulations? He is going to make big changes to the building regulations, so he may as well do a proper, comprehensive job.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on securing this debate. On the issue of asking the Minister to try to convene a seminar, does she agree that in doing that, it would be an idea to have mapped out the most productive areas and the likely benefit to be derived? That would act as a harbinger for extracting the maximum amount of benefit for the minimum amount of input.

Helen Goodman: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We need two maps. We need the map of the geological possibilities and the map of the former coalfields. The Coal Authority has done a lot of work on that. I am sure it has shared that with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, but we need to give these things more currency than they have at the moment. It is also important that we have a national scheme. We do not want a system where builders are required to explore the possibility in, for the sake of argument, Derbyshire, but not in Norfolk. That will mean that they are encouraged to go and build in Norfolk, but not in Derbyshire. That is why we need a national approach. We need to go beyond a strategy to having a plan.

I thank Jeremy Crooks from the Coal Authority and members of the Durham Energy Institute and Durham County Council's planning department. They have all helped me understand this important issue.

2.48 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman)

[*Jim Shannon*]

on bringing forward this important debate. She brings incredible energy and enthusiasm to any subject matter, whether it is here in Westminster Hall or the Chamber, and I thank her for that.

To digress slightly, hailing from Strangford and having lived there for all but four years of my life, my initial interest in this subject began with the sight of the UK's first SeaGen tide turbine, which harnessed nature's resources. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland referred to that with regard to geothermal resources, but in a passing way I want to explain why the first SeaGen tide turbine was interesting to me. I live on the edge of Strangford lough. At the entrance of the lough, at the narrows, the tides rush with an almost nervous but very strong force. The SeaGen project was able to harness that energy. My interest in that came about when I was wearing my former hat, a long time ago, on Ards and North Down Borough Council.

The world's first commercial-scale tidal turbine was commissioned in Northern Ireland's Strangford lough in July 2008. The project had two 600 kW turbines and required a total investment of £12 million. The energy produced equalled the power required by 1,500 households annually. That milestone indicated the completion of the demonstration phase of the project. We recognised that if natural resources were there, we could generate energy from them.

The subject of today's debate—geothermal resources—is clearly slightly different, but the SeaGen project, right on my doorstep, gave me a real interest in this area. I was, and am, passionate about that project because I saw its potential. That interest led me to enjoy the research for today's debate and learning that in Iceland—some hon. Members have intervened along these lines—geothermal energy provides around two-thirds of the country's primary energy demand. I am not sure about running a pipe from Iceland to here, or whatever the proposal may be. Nothing in this world is impossible, but whether it is cost effective is the issue. However, Iceland's achievement is incredible and less reliance on fossil fuels can be only a good thing.

It is time that we started to look at those things. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland has generated the core of interest in the debate to enable us to focus on it and give the Minister time to prepare a detailed and comprehensive response, which I am sure the Minister and her staff are doing at this moment. We can then rely less on insecure middle-eastern trade and influence, and stand on our own two feet.

If someone drives a car or lives in the countryside their petrol and diesel bills will be bigger than most. Some people heat their house with oil. We do not have to worry about that much at this time of year, but at other times we do, and the price of oil is extreme. The countries that resource and supply oil will have a meeting this week, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) mentioned, and there is some indication that the price may be reduced. The fact is that we are experiencing the highest oil prices for some four years. When I go to fill up with diesel on a Saturday morning at 131.9p per litre, that gives me an idea of it. Not too long ago, it was under 107.9p, so that is quite an increase.

The Library briefing paper indicated that the geothermal potential of the UK was investigated by a programme funded by the UK Government and the European Commission that ran from 1977-94. It identified the key heat flow areas of potential in the UK and, in May 2012, a paper by consultants Sinclair Knight Merz in association with the Renewable Energy Association, an industry trade body, argued that geothermal power could provide 20% of the UK's electricity and all of the UK's heat demand. Subsequent reports may have put the figures lower, but the common theme is that there is scope for further investigation of how we can harness geothermal potential in a cost-effective way.

I understand that in Northern Ireland we have some potential for geothermal interest—perhaps in North Antrim and Mid Ulster. There was also talk at one time of potential for development along South Down. I understand that this is not directly the Minister's responsibility, but has any contact been made with the Northern Ireland Assembly, which is unfortunately not working at the moment in the way that it should, to see what part Northern Ireland can play in the strategic policy for the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

In 2017, a study estimated that the UK theoretically had enough resource available to surpass easily all UK energy demand in 2015. However, the amount that was technically available was much smaller than the theoretical resource, and recovery would depend on depths drilled and areas targeted. Although there might be some potential there, the costs of extraction might be such that doing so would not be financially feasible. Can the Minister throw any light on how we can play our part in Northern Ireland?

I am not an engineer—far from it. If a hammer cannot sort something out, I do not know what can, but that is just me being the DIY man around our house. When it comes to doing simple things, if it is easy and a hammer can do it, I am your man. When it comes to the concerns highlighted in today's debate, it is our duty to commission reports from those who have the ability, who are experts and who know what they are talking about. I believe that renewable energy resources are very much worthy of investigation. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland is really saying, "Let's look at that—let's see what we can do." Is it possible to provide 20% of the electricity needs of the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? If we can, it will be time well spent, and I support the hon. Lady in trying to achieve that goal.

I support the Government and the Minister in their pledge of £300 million to invest in district heat networks over the next few years as an important way of ascertaining the best way towards a self-sustaining ability to harness a power source that can address the entire UK's needs. The £300 million seems like a lot, but when spread across the United Kingdom it might not be as much as we would think. However, if it initiates interest in the subject, it is something we should try to do.

In conclusion, I congratulate the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland on introducing the debate. I look forward to the speech of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), and to the Minister's response. We in Northern Ireland want to be part of the strategy, and are keen to see how we can play our part to make that happen. I am keen to see

how we can take advantage of nature's best, and perhaps nature's worst, for energy provision. If we can do that, I think it will be time well spent.

2.57 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans—with your strong and long Welsh history, I hope you may even know the community that I will talk about today.

Geothermal energy has tremendous potential, and I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on securing the debate. It was very interesting to hear her informed view on why such projects can be of huge benefit to Durham, and to the whole of the UK. I will focus my remarks mainly on the Caerau project in my constituency.

Bridgend County Borough Council, which serves two thirds of my constituency, has commissioned a survey to ascertain whether water held in the former Caerau colliery, in the Llynfi valley, could provide a sufficient heat source for a project. If the survey results are positive, there are proposals for a geothermal energy project to generate energy for nearly 1,000 homes across the Llynfi valley. That could provide safe, reliable and cost-effective heat and build a green energy industry in the heart of the south Wales coalfields.

If the project is successful, that will catapult Caerau to the forefront of the UK's energy revolution. The project is a clear example of effective collaborative working, and I pay tribute to the Labour leadership of Bridgend County Borough Council, including Councillor Huw David, the leader, and the Welsh Labour Government. They have worked tirelessly with the private sector to secure the necessary EU funding for the scheme to get the go-ahead.

At its core, this is about moving towards a clean energy mix that the UK can rely on, but it is about much more than that in my opinion. Across the coalfields, many communities are still feeling the effects of the end of the mining industry. At its peak, the Caerau colliery once employed more than 2,400 workers. In the village, the working-age population today is just over 4,000. The end of the industry was disastrous for that community. Even today, the unemployment rate remains stubbornly above the national average. Those communities need funding, employment and industry. Geothermal energy projects can provide that much needed injection.

I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group for coalfield communities and the representative of one of Wales's most prominent coalfield areas, and this is an issue that I care deeply about. Geothermal energy is an opportunity to help regenerate our coalfields, and we must grasp that opportunity to build on the history and tradition of our collieries with a new industry that is clean, safe, and can provide energy and jobs where they are needed.

Of course, such projects have their benefits, but we must take care to listen to those who live close to the collieries and ensure that they have as much support from local residents as possible. In addition, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland has already said, we must ensure that local residents get the potentially lucrative benefits of the projects, and reap part of the economic and social rewards the developments bring,

whether that be through employment opportunities, community funding or receiving a benefit through their energy bills.

I know from speaking to residents in Caerau that there is a lot of optimism and promise for the project, but there is some concern too. It is vital that residents are informed as much as possible about the positives that such projects can bring. Through the design, construction and maintenance process, they must be fully engaged and represented. Their opinions should take priority and it is they who should be the focus of such projects.

Needless to say, geothermal energy is not the silver bullet for solving our energy insecurity as a whole and can only form a part of our future energy mix. It will come as no surprise to the Minister if I take the opportunity to mention the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon as part of that energy mix within Wales and across the United Kingdom. While I am delighted to see the Welsh Government, local government and other authorities supporting projects such as the tidal lagoon, it is for the UK Government to come forward with a long-term proposal that gives us energy security. In my opinion, which again will come as no surprise to the Minister, that should include the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon.

Juggling the trilemma of meeting our climate change targets, improving our energy security and keeping tariffs down for consumers is a difficult task. I accept that, but I would like to stress that we need effective and radical action from the UK Government to address baseline power alongside our work to advance local renewable sources of energy. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland that the Minister is not a paper-pusher; she is a proactive Minister. I would like to believe sincerely that she will do all she can to deliver energy security for the UK using mixed sources, including geothermal energy and the tidal lagoon. I still have faith that the Government will deliver that.

Geothermal energy is a unique opportunity to build industry in communities where it is often missed most, by many people who still remember with great pride serving in collieries and who still face the cycle of unemployment two or three generations after the closure of those heavy industries. Of course, we should take caution and understand that that alone it is not the solution to all of our energy woes—but it is a hugely positive opportunity for our coalfield communities, and for building a future energy mix based on renewable energy. It is one we must give serious consideration to.

I end with an invitation to the Minister. I appreciate that some energy policy is devolved to the Welsh Government, but if she would like to see the Caerau project, I would very much welcome her to my constituency to see in action the innovative work that Bridgend County Borough Council is doing, along with Cardiff University and the Welsh Government.

3.3 pm

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and I apologise for my late arrival to the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on securing this debate. I was lucky enough to secure an Adjournment debate on geothermal injury in my constituency in Clackmannanshire a few weeks ago on 4 June. The Minister was very generous in her response then and I hope she will be even more so today.

[*Luke Graham*]

Geothermal is a fantastic opportunity and, as we have heard from different Members today, it could breathe new life into areas that have been without a key industry and key employment opportunities for a long time. It is important that as part of the industrial strategy, which looks at the entire United Kingdom, we use the powers in this place—energy is of course reserved—to make sure that every part of the United Kingdom benefits from geothermal initiatives and that the United Kingdom remains a leader in renewable energy and shows the way, as we have in other areas, such as wind. As I said in that earlier debate, there are a number of international partners and friendly countries that are already far ahead of us, such as El Salvador and Costa Rica, which already bring in 15% of their energy from geothermal sources. We are leading the way on wind and we want to lead the way on geothermal too.

Energy is a reserved function. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is now not in his place, mentioned the district heating fund—obviously heating is devolved in different parts of the United Kingdom, and that is £300 million. I hope the Minister and the Treasury could apply a little flexibility on how that fund is applied for, especially when it is linking to geothermal energy projects across the United Kingdom, so that all parts of the United Kingdom can benefit.

My Adjournment debate was very much about Clackmannanshire, an important part of my constituency. It has a long history of mining and milling. We have mines filled with water that is sitting at around 40° C. Geothermal energy enables us to use technology to tap some of that warm water to help with heating and to generate power. That could help not only build new homes, but slash energy bills. In my constituency, in Clackmannanshire, about one in three suffer from fuel poverty. Introducing a new form of energy could help tackle that, as well as slashing up to 50% off the energy bills of the local council. As we know, every council in the country faces funding challenges and that would be very welcome.

Geothermal is not a total solution, but it is an important part of our future energy mix. The leadership that the Government have shown through the industrial strategy highlights the fantastic opportunity we have. We have grasped that with both hands with wind, but we can lead in geothermal energy throughout the United Kingdom. I hope that through this debate and the Minister's support we will be able to move that agenda forward and deliver for our constituents.

3.6 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and I thank the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) for securing this debate. Many interesting points have already been made on geothermal energy; it has been quite an education. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland enlightened me that we have an MP in our midst who delivered projects on geothermal energy and I will make reference to that later on. Her points on disused coalmines are absolutely relevant, as were those raised by the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) about the coalmines in Clackmannanshire.

My ears pricked up when the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland mentioned fracking. I would inform those here today that the Scottish Government have won their fracking case. The Court of Session has today rejected a petition by Ineos Upstream Limited and Reach Coal Seam Gas Limited that sought to challenge the Scottish Government's action in relation to unconventional oil and gas. I am absolutely delighted by that.

Luke Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Mc Nally: No, I am not going to take any interventions.

Luke Graham: It was going to be complimentary.

John Mc Nally: I can handle anything at all, but I want to get on with what we are talking about, which is extremely important. With the demise of coalfields, the potential for communities to benefit from new energy possibilities is endless. My home town of Denny in Falkirk is built on coalfields. The whole Falkirk area is built on coalfields and the potential that we have there should be realised. I hope that will happen over time.

As has been mentioned, geothermal energy is the heat stored in the Earth's crust. The term brings to mind large geothermal energy plants exploiting volcanic sources of heat, such as those found in Iceland. As we heard from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), geothermal energy satisfies around two thirds of Iceland's needs. To add to that mix, there is also a vast non-volcanic geothermal heat resource—the top 10 to 15 metres of the Earth's surface act as a heat sink, trapping the sun's heat.

As we have heard, estimates of the UK's geothermal power potential vary. There are credible estimates that we could supply 4% to 20% of the UK's electricity demands, and all of its heat, which is indeed good news, especially if the energy were used to combat fuel poverty. Why people in this energy-rich country suffer from fuel poverty totally escapes me and probably everybody else here. Given the huge potential of this fully renewable resource, why is it not being widely deployed? Will the Minister tell me if any geothermal projects have been awarded to contracts for difference during either of the allocation rounds to date?

There are mature geothermal renewable technologies providing heat and electricity that should and must play their part in the decarbonisation of our energy networks. Then there are ground source heat pumps, where water is pumped through pipes laid within the top 10 to 15 meters of the earth. The pipes absorb heat from the soil, which is then extracted to provide heat. They are cheap to run and are typically small installations, servicing homes, individual buildings or small-scale industry. Ground and water source heat pumps accounted for 6% of non-domestic accredited installations and 15% of domestic accredited installations under the renewable heat initiative between 2011 and April 2018. We surely need to be more ambitious than that.

Deep geothermal plants draw heat from rocks or aquifers heated by the earth's core, and the UK certainly has geological features suitable for that, especially in Cornwall, northern England, the English midlands and Scotland. As the hon. Member for Ochil and South

Perthshire said in a geothermal energy debate on 4 June, there are only nine geothermal energy projects in operation or being planned in the UK: four in Cornwall, two in the north-east of England, one in Southampton and three in Scotland. That is hardly the uptake we would expect for a reliable form of renewable energy that poses few big engineering challenges.

The UK has a poor track record of supporting deep geothermal projects. The UK first showed interest in mapping the country's geothermal potential during the 1970s oil crisis, but funding was withdrawn as oil prices fell. The practice of short-termism and lack of vision had begun. The first commercial deep geothermal project in the UK started life as a Department of Energy research and development project in 1980 in Southampton, as has been mentioned. The Department of Energy abandoned it as being not economically viable. With a lot more vision than the Department of Energy—perhaps thanks to the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead)—Southampton City Council took over the project and developed it into a commercial district heating system, supplying more than 1,000 residential properties as well as hospitals and commercial and civic buildings. I applaud the council for taking that forward and for its courage and vision.

The UK deep geothermal energy challenge fund was set up in 2009 and £4 million was allocated to projects in 2009-10. However, the then Department for Energy and Climate Change halved that in 2010-11. What was it playing at? An early-day motion was lodged by a cross-party group of MPs expressing regret about the decision and 46 MPs signed it. Will the Minister tell us whether I am right in thinking that no further funding has been provided by the fund? I look forward to her answer.

In 2013, the Government withdrew a £6 million grant allocated to the United Downs geothermal power station project in Cornwall on the basis that the project could not attract enough private investment. However, the project went ahead in 2017 after the company was able to crowdsource nearly £4.5 million in private investment using debentures sold by the renewable energy and crowdsourcing specialist Abundance Investment. There seem to be an unending series of obstacles facing projects because of the Government.

The UK's regulatory landscape and renewable heat initiative create structural barriers to investment in geothermal energy. There is no joined-up approach to licensing geothermal energy in the UK. Developers must navigate the planning system plus a number of environmental permits and consents, and a lengthy, complex process involving local planning authorities, the Environment Agency, English Heritage and other bodies. Unlike a licensing system, a system of permits cannot secure investment in the geothermal sector. As far as I am aware, there is nothing to prevent another developer drilling next door to an existing development once a company has demonstrated a successful well. Will the Minister confirm whether that is the case?

Arrangements for geothermal energy under the RHI actually prevent investment. Asset-based lenders and finance companies do not regard future RHI revenues to be security against lending risks as they would in the case of physical assets. The physical assets of a geothermal energy project have poor portability, since so much of them are stuck in the ground. Asset-based lenders and

finance companies do not view the assets as security because they are difficult, if not impossible, to liquidate. Projects cannot lock in to an RHI tariff at the pre-accreditation stage, which adds uncertainty, particularly for projects with long lead-in times. RHI asset ownership rules are complex and prevent companies using an operating lease model, since under the present arrangements the asset finance provider would have to be the applicant receiving the RHI revenues.

It is interesting that a third of the operations are in Scotland, where there is consistency of support. Following a feasibility study of the potential of geothermal energy to provide a renewable source of heat in Scotland, published in 2012-13, the Scottish Government set up their geothermal energy challenge fund. In 2015, the fund invested nearly £250,000 in five feasibility studies. The projects are an important step towards demonstrating how geothermal energy could cut the estimated £2.6 billion a year spent on heating by householders and the non-domestic sector. They are in the Aberdeen Exhibition Centre; Guardbridge in Fife; Polkemmet in West Lothian; Hartwood in North Lanarkshire; and Hill of Banchory in Aberdeenshire. A small investment returns very large benefits.

A further four proposed projects were invited to contact the Scottish Government's low carbon infrastructure transition programme team to discuss possible early development support to help them in their proposals. Scotland's first deep geothermal heating system, the HALO 2 km deep borehole being drilled near Kilmarnock, received a £1.8 million grant and is under way as we speak. The Scottish Government's investment in renewables is underpinned by a coherent decarbonisation strategy and is in turn underpinned by an all-party agreement. The political certainty, and the consistent political and financial support for that and for renewable energy as a whole, sends a message to businesses that the Scottish Government and Parliament are a friendly environment for investment in geothermal technologies.

Today Scotland may have a third of the UK's planned or operational geothermal energy plants, but it seems that proportion will increase steeply in the near future. As with onshore wind and wave energy, the UK Government could learn much from the Scottish Government's approach to supporting geothermal energy development. We are at a privileged moment in time developing renewable energy. The Scottish Government and Parliament are realising that ambition on behalf of all our communities.

Finally, I have been clear that any threat to Scotland's distinctive and ambitious approach to environmental standards and climate change is completely unacceptable. The best way to ensure our environmental ambitions is to ensure that Scotland's devolved powers continue to be respected.

3.17 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on securing this important debate and on putting her case with such clarity and precision. After what she found out about geothermal during her research for this debate, I am sure she will agree with me that it is indeed Britain's forgotten renewable. It is not forgotten because it is not feasible or because it does not bring tremendous benefits. It is forgotten

[*Dr Alan Whitehead*]

simply because no one has done much about it, even though that resource is under our feet in many parts of the country and is relatively easy to access. When that resource is accessed and developed, it provides potential free heat and power, probably for 100 to 150 years, as a result of a single borehole drilled down into the ground to unleash it.

Why it should be forgotten is a source of puzzlement to me, because it is a universal and beneficial renewable. Some people may regard deep geothermal as not quite renewable, in that if there is drilling into a deep geothermal aquifer, the aquifer, in theory, depletes over time. However, if water is being raised from the aquifer at the typical temperature level in the UK of about 73° or 74° Celsius, that resource will deplete at only 1° in heat per 100 years. Yes, it depletes a bit, but it is not exactly calamitous—unlike, one might say, drilling a fracking well, where the well depletes after about eight years.

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): Such a fact-free debate.

Dr Whitehead: No, it is a very factual debate—that is the difference.

The geothermal potential of the country is enormous, and the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) set out what the potential would be, in electricity and heat, for the UK were we to proceed seriously with geothermal energy. Perhaps a limiting factor is the fact that geothermal energy is not available everywhere in the country. We need to be clear about the fact that deep geothermal is available on the basis of three different kinds of site. Basins with very ancient water at the bottom are one kind of site. Another kind, which require slightly different technology, are areas with radiothermal granite batholiths. I believe that the Minister, as a first-rate geographer in her time, will know all about batholiths and lopoliths and various other things. We have quite a lot of radiothermal batholiths in the UK, with naturally occurring radioactive-based heat coming from deep within the earth's crust. Another kind of site relies on the availability of technology to release heat by putting water down one pipe and up another, giving geothermal as a result.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland mentioned, lower-temperature geothermal resources arise from abandoned mine workings. With heat-concentration techniques that is not a problem, in terms of concentrating the heat to get into production either for heat distribution or, indeed, for making steam to generate electricity.

As hon. Members have kindly mentioned, I have an interest in the debate because I think I can claim to be the only sitting Member of Parliament who has directly set up a geothermal energy scheme. I know a little, therefore, about how it all works. That scheme is based, as has been mentioned, in the middle of Southampton in a not particularly prepossessing shed, with a small wellhead in the carpark of the former Toys R Us store. That unprepossessing setting hides a well, drilled to about 1,800 metres. Water comes up at just over 70° Celsius and is converted into the material for a district heating scheme by a heat exchanger and concentrator. Now Southampton has a city centre district heating scheme with some 17 km of pipes, covering the university, the civic centre, the country's only geothermally heated

hypermarket and a five-star hotel. In other words, there is a complete city centre arrangement, heated substantially by geothermal energy. Not only that, but it has been heated in that way on an untroubled basis since 1987, and will continue to be so until 2087 on present estimates of what may be available. That is the potential, in practice, for geothermal energy.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The hon. Gentleman speaks with great knowledge, and I pay tribute to his work promoting geothermal power in his constituency. What are his thoughts on the potential for geothermal power in more rural areas, where there is great reliance on oil central heating, often at great cost and with a high carbon footprint? Does he believe that more could be done to incentivise and encourage developers in rural areas to look at geothermal power for new developments and homes?

Dr Whitehead: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that he is the only Member present for the debate who does not have a geothermal resource under his constituency. I have mentioned the different types of geothermal resource, and the large Mesozoic basins are in East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, around the whole Wessex area, in Southampton and Worcester, and in Cheshire. The radiothermal batholiths are in the eastern highlands, across the north-east and north-west of England, and in Cornwall. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will be delighted to know that about half of Northern Ireland is covered by two Mesozoic basins, giving most areas a strong resource.

The problem is, first, that that resource is not available everywhere and, secondly, that because of the capital cost of the borehole, geothermal energy is probably best suited to larger district schemes. One of the key issues is that because of the immediate availability of the resource, if an area—particularly a rural area—is capable of receiving it, it can be used for relatively small district heating schemes, or for local plant producing electricity in the area with a combination of a relatively small heat take-off. There is considerable potential, but I am sorry to tell the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) that drilling under his constituency at the moment would be fruitless, as far as I am aware. However, it is possible to do it in some rural constituencies where the resource is more available.

Dr Poulter: A number of new, larger homes—particularly barn conversions, which are very popular in Suffolk—have invested in the technology as a means of heating. My question is more about how we can do more to incentivise developers on small-scale developments, perhaps on the edge of rural villages and towns, to look at similar schemes, and what suggestions the hon. Gentleman may have to bring forward those incentives.

Dr Whitehead: I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to vertical hole shallow geothermal ground source heat installations. They are perfect for rural homes, as he described. They will provide sufficient heat, from a relatively shallow penetration into the earth, for heat exchangers to heat a home to a regular temperature of 60°-plus. Although I do not think that that is an essential part of this afternoon's debate—it is more to do with ground source heat pumps—the hon. Gentleman is right. It is a technology that I would

strongly recommend for off-grid properties in which, in the past, the alternative heating might have been oil. It can absolutely reliably replace that form of heating. I join the hon. Gentleman in recommending to the Minister and the Government that efforts to secure the installation of ground source heat pumps for off-grid properties in rural areas would bear considerable fruit and ought to be strongly supported—rather more strongly supported, I suggest, under the renewable heat initiative than is currently the case.

I hope that I have set out the potential for geothermal energy, and stated how it can be done in practice and what its benefits are. I was leader of Southampton City Council at the time that the scheme I described was initiated, but provided that it had the resource, almost any local authority in the country could pilot and undertake such a scheme relatively easily. The main issue is how to raise the initial capital funding up front to get the scheme under way.

Let me say one or two words about what the Government ought to be doing—in addition to the constructive and sensible suggestions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland—to start using this resource. Capital grants will be required up front for the essential drilling of the well. The Government have underwritten several such schemes in various parts of the country to the tune of about £2 million a time, and we should extend the availability of those initial grants. Currently, the money available through the non-domestic renewable heat incentive is not sufficient to get those schemes under way from a capital point of view. As far as deep geothermal is concerned, the RHI currently provides 5.38p per kWh. That does not compare favourably with funding for ground source heat pumps, which comes out at 9.36p.

At the moment, the incentives to get such a scheme going properly in any area are not sufficient. That is particularly unfortunate; geothermal energy ought to be considered a different form of renewable energy, because of its known longevity. When we invest in a geothermal energy plant, we are investing in a capacity that will give us free energy for 120 years—we cannot say that about pretty much any other renewable energy source, except possibly the Swansea tidal lagoon. I therefore think that the criteria under which geothermal energy is considered should be based on that kind of payback and that kind of timeframe.

Helen Goodman: My hon. Friend tempts me down a path that will be familiar to many colleagues. His point raises the question of whether it is appropriate to use the same Treasury discount rate for something that is so long-run as we would for a project that would last for 25 years. That would be another way of squaring the circle.

Dr Whitehead: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point—that might be her seventh recommendation for the Minister this afternoon.

In conclusion, all hon. Members who have contributed to this debate have made clear their support for the potential of this form of renewable energy, and they have given examples from various parts of the UK. I particularly applaud the Scottish Government's initiative to bring forward real funding for geothermal schemes, and I hope that in the not-too-distant future Southampton will no longer be the only geothermal plant in the entire United Kingdom that operates in the way I described.

There are glimpses of progress here and there, but it is by no means continuous or anywhere near to fulfilling the enormous potential that geothermal energy offers.

My request and suggestion to the Minister is that she might like to come to Southampton and have a look at the little wellhead in the Toys R Us carpark and the shed in which the scheme is housed, so that she can see for herself just how much comes from that little site, how much good it has done for a whole community and city, and how much good it will do for many years to come. We should consider geothermal energy in that way, and if we do, we will go a long way towards understanding how good it could be for the UK. I hope that we will then put our resources where our hopes are and ensure that geothermal energy has a bright future in the UK, just as it already does in other countries.

The hon. Member for Falkirk said that 66% of Iceland's overall energy requirements come from geothermal energy. Indeed, a project called IceLink is currently considering the possibility of an interconnector between Iceland and the UK, in partnership with National Grid and Landsvirkjun, the state-owned generator in Iceland. That is a real possibility for the future. We could be in the position of having home-grown geothermal energy and bringing into the country someone else's geothermal energy to complement that, so that together we would have a completely carbon-free source of energy that would last the UK for a century. I think that is a prize to be worked for.

3.38 pm

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): It is a great pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. We have had a brilliant and fascinating debate, and I commend the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) for an extremely thoughtful, excellent, fact-filled and numerical brief. It is always music to my ears to hear about net present values, particularly when they involve a £7 billion greater turnover for an industry, and the opportunity to create billions of pounds of gross value added and provide many jobs. I thank her for putting the debate in that context. I also thank, as she did, the Coal Authority and Durham University for providing an excellent backdrop to the debate.

As the hon. Lady pointed out, 25% of housing stock in her constituency sits on top of coal workings, which were dug out at exceptional, personal cost by men working in the most horrific conditions, with heat often being one of the worst things they had to deal with. It should therefore come as no surprise that the areas that have been allowed to flood are hot areas, and it would be great to think that at the Durham miners' gala on 14 July, the topic might be how the legacy that was so painfully won by the shovels and picks of so many men could be used to create something positive for our low-carbon future.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) is always good at explaining these issues. I will not run through the batholiths argument again, but we have a long history of exploiting our various deep-geothermal sources. Like many other places, Bath, which is close to my constituency, was built on the thermal springs that were a happy by-product of those hot-spots. It was a pleasure to hear the hon. Gentleman describe the scheme

[Claire Perry]

in the city of Southampton, which was the first of its kind in the UK. The important thing about that example is that it shows when it works. This sort of heating works well when there is year-round take-up. One of the issues with such schemes is that they do not work terribly well when people need heating at just one time of the year, because the economics are not attractive. The hon. Gentleman said that an entire ecosystem was constructed around that heat, so that is a really good example. Of course, the water is 76°, so it comes up pretty hot. As the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland knows, the Eastgate renewable energy village, near her constituency, is the first eco-village in the UK. It was funded as way to explore this technology, and it provides heat from geothermal sources.

This is an incredibly exciting time to come together to talk about this issue. In 2013, we commissioned a review of the opportunities for geothermal, both heat and energy—I will talk about the distinction in a moment—and we mapped out the relevant parts of the UK. We have to pick through the issue of geothermal for energy and heat carefully. Iceland sits on the spot where the mid-Atlantic ridge breaks apart, which is not necessarily the most geologically stable place to be, so massive amounts of geothermal energy come to the surface, and islands are created overnight. I am very interested in the Icelandic interconnector project, which has the opportunity to create jobs in a cable factory where the interconnector makes landfall, and is a very interesting opportunity to bring in power generated by high levels of geothermal energy.

Unlike Iceland, we have relatively few opportunities to generate geothermal energy easily and cost effectively. The hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) asked whether any projects have received a CFD, but none have bid in. Given what has happened to the cost of renewables—we have led the world in developing an offshore wind industry, and we are buying renewable energy at low prices that we could not have imagined even a few years ago—it is difficult for geothermal electricity to compete for CFDs. Arguably, the opportunities for heat are much more local and interesting.

Hon. Members have talked about the challenge of shallow geothermal, and we think that the most promising area is the low-temperature applications, such as district heating schemes. As the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland said, the water in her constituency is 30° C and shallow, so we do not need an incredibly difficult boring process to get it. We have heard from all parts of the UK, which is refreshing, about the opportunities for such heat schemes. I found the hon. Lady's point about creating an export industry fascinating, because of course it was the mining industry that created the beam engine. The newcomer Watt engines, which pumped water out of the mines, led directly to the industrial revolution and our global leadership in technology. It is fascinating to think about how we can extract heat from those mines and create export industries across the UK.

The British Geological Survey, which is a marvellous institution, has surveyed the UK. We know about the opportunities both for deep geothermal heat and for shallow geothermal heat extraction, which is very widely distributed. Every investment we make has to pass a triple test: it has to deliver decarbonisation, it has to be

deliverable at the right cost for consumers, and it has to create economic value added, as the hon. Lady expounded eloquently. That is the filter through which we review these schemes.

The hon. Member for Falkirk asked me several questions, which I shall try to answer. One was about the CFD—hopefully he is satisfied with my answer. Secondly, he said that the Government are not doing anything, but I am afraid I have to reject that. Heat is a devolved matter in Scotland, as he knows, but that has not prevented the UK Government from providing £4.5 million for the deep geothermal challenge scheme. The £250,000 he referred to was a welcome addition, but most of the funding was provided by UK-wide taxpayers. He talked about the HALO project, which I believe has been funded to the tune of £1.8 million by the Scottish Government and £3.5 million by the UK Government. I do not like to make political points; I find it much better to talk about investing in our UK-wide resources for the benefit of UK consumers and taxpayers. We have to go through the technological process and ensure these projects are economically effective so we do not burden taxpayers and bill payers unnecessarily, and we have to innovate.

Most houses—although not in rural areas—are on the gas grid, so when we invest we have to think hard about the cost trajectory vis-à-vis the fully costed position of being on gas heating. On the issue of rural homes, I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) here because, like him, I represent a very rural constituency, in which more than 40,000 homes, including mine, are not on grid. The challenge of decarbonising those homes and reducing our dependency on heating oil, which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned, is live. In our clean growth strategy, we set out our intention to ensure that no new buildings in rural areas use fossil fuel sources of heat by 2025. We are determined to get to that level and to encourage innovation of the kind that my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich talked about.

How do we innovate, drive down the cost of extraction and use that heat to the maximum effect to ensure that these projects are economically viable? We are working with the Natural Environmental Research Council and the BGS, and are funding a £9 million geothermal research facility—the UK geoenergy observatory—to study low-temperature geothermal energy in former mines in Glasgow. We also have a number of other innovation programmes and are working with the industry.

I want to flag up a possible route to funding, because I want to ensure that some of these schemes are developed. Phase 7 of the industrial strategy challenge fund, with £10 million of funding, is open for bids. The launch event for it is on 4 July. It would be great to see whether we can create a bid for an innovative scheme to produce a working, cost-effective scheme. As the hon. Member for Ogmere (Chris Elmore) said, we have the heat networks investment project, with more than £300 million of funding. I commend the Welsh Government, Bridgend County Borough Council and the hon. Gentleman's efforts in creating that scheme, which has bid into the heat networks scheme. Although this is a devolved matter in Wales, as always I think we are better when we work together. This is an opportunity to bring forward innovation and create a scheme that can be incorporated

into heat networks. I would be absolutely delighted to meet the Coal Authority or anybody else who is willing to help us think about how we can pull such a scheme together, because I want to see innovation proceed. Given the constituency interest of the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland, perhaps she is the person to lead that delegation.

We have the innovation route to market and the heat networks scheme. I have been given a number of “go away and look at them” actions, including looking at risk insurance and planning. As I said about the clean growth strategy, our building regulations must ensure that we do not put up new builds in off-grid areas that are dependent on current forms of fossil fuel heating.

We have an opportunity to make this very large latent resource, which was won so painfully over many years, part of our low-carbon future. We have spent tens of millions of pounds in this area. The UK is in a fortunate situation, because our renewables industry is powering ahead. Other countries look with envy at what we have delivered through other renewable sources of energy. We are one of two countries in the world doing enough to meet even a 2° rise in climate, due to what we have done in our energy industry. The opportunity to decarbonise heat, create local productivity and resource, and generate innovation that we can export elsewhere in the world is incredibly interesting.

Once again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland on securing this debate. I thank all other Members who spoke—we had a marvellous conversation about the opportunities in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham). This is a very opportune time: there are routes to innovation, such as the heat networks investment, and I am in the lucky position of being able to make investment. I would like to see some of this innovation coming forward.

3.49 pm

Helen Goodman: I am pleased that we have had this debate, and I am grateful to all hon. Members who have taken part, because the subject is extremely worthwhile and important. I am grateful to the Minister for her positive attitude to geothermal. She does not need to worry: we shall come back to her and pursue this, because geothermal is important and could be very productive for this country.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered potential for geothermal energy resources in the UK.

3.50 pm

Sitting suspended.

Mortgage Interest

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

3.54 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered support for mortgage interest.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Hollobone.

When people develop disability during their working life, it can disrupt those lives in profound ways, often making it impossible for them to work. Disability will not always take a person's life plans into account, and the Government have a responsibility to stabilise people's lives in new circumstances. Recent changes to the Government support for mortgage interest scheme mean that the safety net to help such people to keep their homes is being eroded.

Taking out a mortgage over several decades is of course always a risk. Most people would never dream, on signing those papers, that a disability might one day affect their ability to pay the mortgage. Yet with about 170,000 claims for support for mortgage interest as of 2016, the issue is clearly widespread and affects a significant percentage of home-owning families in the UK.

Until 5 April 2018 the Government had offered support for mortgage interest as a benefit to homeowners in hardship. That covered only the interest payments on their mortgage. The amount borrowed, insurance policies and arrears were to be paid by the homeowner, but for disabled claimants that in practice would mean scraping the money together from their employment support allowance and personnel independence payments.

Since April, the Government have stopped mortgage interest support, instead offering a loan to be paid back with interest. It is repaid when the home is sold, ownership is transferred or the homeowner dies, making the sale of the house more costly and difficult for the claimant or members of the family. Many people are wary of taking out a loan due to that aspect of the policy, and the effect it might have on a future house sale.

Figures contained in the Office for Budget Responsibility's “Economic and fiscal outlook” reveal that although all existing claimants have been contacted about the change, only about 10,000 have so far agreed to take up the loan. According to the document, that is “90 per cent short of the 100,000 expected by the end of 2018-19.” Many constituents have also approached me about the fact the loans will be delivered by Serco, a company exposed in the Paradise papers as having “a history of problems, failures, fatal errors and overcharging”.

Problems with the policy may cause many people to sell their unaffordable homes and move into the private rented sector. In doing so, many would be eligible for housing benefit, but that would in fact create additional expense for the taxpayer: the average support for mortgage interest claimant under the pre-April rules received about £1,800 per year, whereas the average housing benefit claimant receives about £5,000 per year.

The Government have labelled the change a cost-saving exercise, and claim that it is done in the name of fairness. The Minister stated in a letter that “the Government believes that it is right that, when they can, homeowners should repay this financial help they receive from taxpayers to accrue an asset, which may increase in value over time.”

[Angela Crawley]

However, it comes at the cost of forcing people to take on repayment of a new and unforeseen loan. At the same time, housing benefit can be paid to private landlords, who are able to pay their mortgages from taxpayer money given to tenants in receipt of housing benefit, without any of the associated requirements to repay. Even the Government and the Minister may agree that that is slightly hypocritical—it is not in keeping with the new term, the loan. The change in policy is causing extreme stress to already vulnerable individuals, in addition to forcing them to pay interest out of benefits that are designed to cover basic costs of living.

That was the case for my constituent, Alistair Dickson from Stonebyres, who was in receipt of the support for mortgage interest benefit. Mr Dickson was registered as blind at work and, as a result, had to leave his job. He receives employment support allowance and disability living allowance, and has been paying his mortgage and home insurance from those payments. As a result, his household budgets are extremely tight, and it is very important to him to be able to stay in his own home. This is where he has adapted to his new circumstances as a blind person, and where he feels safe. My constituent is unable to leave the house as often as he used to as a result of his disability, so that is where he feels most comfortable. He is aware that, financially, it would be easier for him to move into rented accommodation, but that would not offer the same security, comfort or familiarity as his own home. That is therefore not an option for him. I do not believe he is alone.

Tens of thousands of disabled people, people with long-term illnesses, and pensioners who had previously claimed support for mortgage interest but who have declined to take up a loan, are in the same position. They do not know where they will scrape together the money for their mortgages. They do not know if they should pack up their homes, downsize or go into rented accommodation. They do not know whether their only option is to take out a questionable Government loan. All they do know is that that terrible policy decision has been made, putting into jeopardy their ability to maintain their own home. On their behalf, therefore, I ask the Government to pause and reconsider an ill-designed policy change to ensure that they do not penalise homeowners.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): My hon. Friend gives an excellent constituent example. Does she agree that many constituents across the UK found themselves getting a surprise letter from Serco, which caused fear and alarm across the board in people affected by this policy?

Angela Crawley: The Government's decision to have Serco institute this policy seems rather absurd given its recent bad press. Again, I must ask the Government to pause and reconsider this ill-designed policy change, and make sure that we do not penalise homeowners for changes to their circumstances that are beyond their control. Will the Government consider that?

4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Kit Malthouse): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East

(Angela Crawley) has raised the question of support for mortgage interest and I congratulate her on securing the debate. However, she seems to have developed a number of misapprehensions about the scheme, how it operates, and, in particular, how the system works.

It is worth restating the principles behind the change in the policy. Back in 1948 when the policy was introduced, the housing market was a different place and mortgage products were a different thing. In those days, it was unheard of for people to take mortgages into retirement, there was no such thing as an interest-only mortgage and the average house price was about £1,700. In the intervening decades, the housing market has changed significantly, yet this part of the benefits system remained unreformed and unchanged to reflect the reality we now face.

Back in 2015, when the reform was announced in the Budget, it was deemed to be appropriate and fair to reform the system to reflect the fact that there had been significant changes in the housing market and, as the hon. Lady outlined, to transfer this payment from a welfare payment in the benefits system to a loan. It was also decided that from a cosmetic point of view, as far as possible, there should be no change in how people see the scheme operate. It was recognised that the original scheme was designed to maintain people in their own homes and, exactly as the hon. Lady says, to ensure that they did not go into the private rental sector or lose their homes because of temporary unemployment. Back in 1948, this was meant to be something temporary for a few months or perhaps a couple of years, not the 20 years for which some people have been on it.

It was decided—we have carried this out in the execution of the scheme—that there should be as little disruption as possible to the recipients of these payments in the reformed new system. On a day-to-day basis, recipients of support for mortgage interest should see no difference between the old and new scheme.

The only difference is that when the property is sold or transferred at the end, perhaps even after the owners of the house have died, the amount of accumulated loan is recovered from that property. That is the only difference. On a day-to-day basis, the payments will still be made at exactly the same rate, with the same frequency, in the same way and with the same purpose of maintaining people in their own homes.

Let me cover some of the issues that the hon. Lady raises. On numbers, there is a significant acceleration in the number of people deciding either way. The bulk of people have now made a decision in principle. Large numbers of people are now in payment of the new support for their houses and quite a lot of people are in the process of getting through the system. The numbers are looking better and better. We expect to be on timetable for the transition to be complete later this year. We will publish statistics on SMI on a regular basis to keep the House updated.

Secondly, the hon. Lady raised Serco's involvement. Let us be clear: Serco is not administering the loan. It was contracted only to provide information to individuals.

4.4 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.15 pm

On resuming—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The sitting was suspended for 11 minutes, so the debate can last until 4.41 pm. I call the Minister.

Kit Malthouse: Thank you, Mr Hollobone. I was going through a number of the issues that the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East raised about support for mortgage interest, and I had reached the involvement of Serco, about which she raised concerns. Let me be clear: Serco does not administer the loan scheme. Serco was contracted merely to provide some of the initial information about the scheme—the initial correspondence, the follow-up phone calls to give people information about it, and the booklet to inform people how it works.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister not accept that the issue is with the timescales and the lack of notice? Have the Government learned no lessons from the changes to the state pension age? What assessment has been made of the number of women affected by those changes who are also affected by this change?

Kit Malthouse: I do not accept that there has been a lack of communication. If anything, we have over-communicated about the scheme. We went out of our way as a Department to ensure that literally hundreds of thousands of letters were sent and hundreds of thousands of telephone calls were made. We are still trying to contact some people, given the lack of clarity about the data we need to make those contacts. We are taking this in a very steady and sensible way.

Everyone is given plenty of time to make a decision—everyone is given up to six weeks from the loan offer to decide whether they want the loan. Once the loan documents are issued and sent off and a loan offer is made, people get six weeks to make a decision. We signpost people to the Money Advice Service or Citizens Advice if they need any kind of financial advice, because neither Serco nor the Department for Work and Pensions can offer such advice. As I said, there is a communication phase, which Serco handles, and the execution and administration of the loan is done entirely by DWP operations.

Angela Crawley: Does the Minister accept, though, that six weeks is in real terms quite a short time in which to get the relevant and necessary financial advice? Relying on services such as Citizens Advice—voluntary, third sector services that are often financially strapped—to give people the necessary financial advice about their future seems a bit irresponsible on the Government's part.

Kit Malthouse: I do not accept that sending people to Citizens Advice or the Money Advice Service for advice is irresponsible. That is exactly what those organisations are there to do, and they do it very well on a daily basis. Do not forget that the six weeks are from the loan offer—the point at which someone says in principle that they would like to have a loan. They then have six weeks in which to decide, execute the documents and send

them back. There is a whole period before that in which people gather information and discuss the matter with their financial advisers and, indeed, with Serco if they need more information on which to make a decision. Do not forget that the communication process started in July last year, so it has been ongoing for quite a while, and tens of thousands of people have successfully made a decision either way.

Chris Stephens: The Minister seems to indicate that affected individuals receive correspondence from his Department before the Serco letter. That is not what my constituents tell me, so will he place that correspondence in the Library for us to review?

Kit Malthouse: No, people do not receive correspondence prior to the Serco letter. An initial letter and an information booklet are sent out by Serco to warm them up to the change that is coming, and there is then a variety of follow-up information. Once someone has had all the information and thinks they are in a position to make a decision, they are in effect handed over to the operations people in the Department, who proceed to execute the loan—or otherwise—and load them on to the system for payment. As I said, tens of thousands of people have successfully made the transition, and many people are now receiving payment of the new support for mortgage interest.

I want to move on to a couple of other issues. The hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East mentioned vulnerable recipients. We have taken particular care over those who are vulnerable and those who might not have the mental capacity to make financial decisions on their own. In those cases, the timeframe for execution, resolution and transition has been significantly extended. We are working with people either who we know are vulnerable or who were identified during the process as vulnerable to ensure that they have an appointed financial adviser, deputy or whatever it might be to make those financial decisions for them. That process is much longer; we are able to extend it to be pretty much as long as they need to make the position clear.

The hon. Lady raised a particular constituency case. I urge her to reassure her constituents that the new scheme is designed to maintain them in their home. On a day-to-day basis they will see absolutely no change whatsoever. They can stay in that home for as long as they like—for the rest of their natural life. The only change for them is if they sell that house or it is inherited by someone following their death and there is any equity in the house, the accumulated loan will be recovered from the proceeds. If there is no equity, we write the loan off. Do not forget that it is a very low-cost loan: the interest we charge is the same as that charged to the Government on their debt. It is in statute that it is a low-rate loan. We recognise that this is a disruption and change for people, but as we take the scheme forward we will try to make it as painless as possible.

We expect that a number of people will decide not to take the loan but to try to go it on their own, making their own mortgage payments. We are hearing anecdotally that people are either managing to make the rest of their mortgage payments or turning to family for assistance. However, if in three or four months' time they do not think it is manageable, they think they have got themselves into trouble or they are in arrears on their mortgage

[*Kit Malthouse*]

because they have not been able to make payments, it is open to them to come back to us and reapply for SMI. If they are in trouble, we will be perfectly willing to backdate that to the date of change for them, to 6 or 7 April, to clear their arrears and ensure that we do not put anyone in a difficult position.

I stress that this change is about increasing sustainability and fairness, balancing the interests of the taxpayer against those of someone who is in extremis and needs assistance but nevertheless is in ownership of what could be a very valuable capital asset. In other parts of the benefit system, we do not necessarily allow people to accumulate capital assets. If someone applies for housing benefit, we look at their assets and if they have between £6,000 and £16,000 in cash in the bank, whatever it is that affects it. SMI is specifically about protecting people's homes and ensuring that they are maintained in those homes for the long term.

Angela Crawley: Does the Minister accept that through housing benefit most people forced into the private rented sector are paying someone else's mortgage? Is it not a tad hypocritical to say that someone in hardship or who will not otherwise be able to work again should not have their mortgage paid when those in the private sector, often renting from private landlords, are paying mortgages through housing benefit?

Kit Malthouse: I do not accept the equation the hon. Lady is creating between the two. Those on housing benefit are being supported by us with a legally enforceable rental liability. It might be to a private landlord, a housing association or a council—who knows? They

have a rental liability and we want to maintain them in their home, so we will support them in that through housing benefit.

Through SMI, if someone gets into extremis, we want to maintain them in their home and support them in their mortgage, subject to capital limits. All we are saying is that if someone stays on SMI for some time and therefore profit accumulates in their home, once they sell it some or all of that very low-interest, low-cost loan should be recovered so we can recycle that into support for other people in search of housing, in need of support and housing benefit or, indeed, in need of SMI. That seems only fair and reasonable.

We reckon that the overall saving for the taxpayer will be £150 million, plus or minus—we will see where we get to. Overall, in fairness, given how the housing market has changed and that SMI was only ever meant to be a temporary support—only for us to find people who have been on it for decades, and about half the people on SMI are pensioners, so there is likely to be significant equity locked into the property being supported—it seems reasonable that, when that house is sold, the taxpayer should recover some or all of the money advanced to maintain that person in their home.

Critical for us is that the scheme achieves exactly the same objective as the old benefit payments. People who need support for their mortgage can rely on the state to support them while they get back on their feet, or whatever it might be, and maintain them in their home. The hon. Lady's constituent can be reassured that SMI should not change their status at all. If they take the loan, we will do our best to support them to stay in their home for the foreseeable future.

Question put and agreed to.

A120 Dualling

4.26 pm

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the proposal to dual the A120.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. A line in my maiden speech to this House in 2015 was a request of the Government. I said that I would fight for the Government to

“help relieve congestion on the A120, a road so regularly and heavily congested that many drivers cut through Braintree in order to bypass the bypass.”—[*Official Report*, 10 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1287.]

It got a chuckle at the time, if not today. The point was that much of the town of Braintree, after which my constituency is named, is regularly blighted by heavy congestion and long tailbacks. My commuters and residents experience frustration because the A120 is regularly backed up to both the east and west of Galley’s Corner, a major interchange. To the west, people trying to get to the major retail site at Freeport are often stuck in traffic, as are people coming home from work. To the east of that junction, a number of small villages that straddle the A120 are brought to a standstill because of the tailbacks.

For those who are unaware of the geography of the A120, the section we are speaking about starts just to the south of Braintree and stretches across to the junction with the A12. It is part of a major east-west arterial route in a significant part of the country in both cultural and economic potential terms. Stansted airport is on it, and at the other end is the seaport of Harwich. There is a natural flow from an airport to a seaport, yet in the middle—the section we are speaking about—it reduces to an unsegregated minor road with one lane in each direction.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend, who has been a doughty campaigner on this issue, on bringing the debate forward. Does he agree that the A120 is a road of national significance because our region is a net contributor to the Exchequer and that, if it wants that to remain the case, we need the infrastructure in East Anglia and the south-east that supports Essex, Suffolk and the whole region?

James Cleverly: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. He is right, and he invites me to come on to what I think is a credible pitch for why this road needs improvement. I am certain that my parliamentary colleagues who have constituencies along the route will enhance and reinforce some of the points that I will briskly make, to give time for others to speak.

I have already mentioned having a major airport and a major seaport at either end of this section of road, but ambitious plans have been discussed by local government at both district and county level to unlock the economic potential of this part of Essex and, in doing so, reinforce the economic potential of one of the few net contributory regions to the UK economy. The east of England is one of the net contributors to the UK economy. We want to contribute more, and we would be able to if we could unlock the entrepreneurialism and business acumen of the people who live and work in our part of the country.

Both at district and at county level, there are ambitious plans for business investment and housing investment. Housing is interwoven with the necessity for good quality infrastructure—transport infrastructure, as well as digital and water infrastructure, and social infrastructure such as schools and doctors’ surgeries. It is absolutely key. The road is currently well out of date; it is at best a 1950s or 1960s road, dealing with a 21st-century level of traffic. Improving and dualling this road, rerouting it and taking away the pinch point at Galley’s Corner will not just benefit my constituents in Braintree—although as their representative here that is what I am passionate about—but it will benefit the county as a whole and the country as a whole.

The reason I talk about residents, local government and businesses is that we speak with one voice on this issue. It has been incredibly important to us that local residents, local small businesses, local businesses, Members of Parliament, district council and county council are all on the same page. We are keen not to miss the chance to get funding from Government in the next few years to relieve the pressure on a congested and often dangerous road.

I conclude by saying to the Minister that at this time we need to ensure that the whole of the UK economy is optimised. We have a fantastic opportunity ahead of us. We are now talking about international trade really, for the first time in a generation. For a road in the home counties, with an airport and a seaport, to still be so under-resourced is no longer acceptable. I ask Government to look seriously and sympathetically at the route that Essex County Council has put forward as its favoured option, because if the Government are able to support it, we can help the Government to pay the bills.

4.33 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my colleagues for securing this important debate. It is a debate that gives me déjà vu, as I have previously held and spoken in a number of debates on this very road and on strategic infrastructure in Essex over the last eight years, in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. Once again, the walls of Westminster Hall are about to hear the economic case for the A120.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) has already outlined, the A120 is an economic corridor stretching from the international port of Harwich in the east, which has trade links across northern Europe and serves around 700,000 passengers a year, to Stansted airport in the west, an important international airport that is growing and expanding, and is a huge employer both in Essex and now also in parts of Hertfordshire.

The A120 is important to our economy; in my view and, I think, all our views, it is even more important to the United Kingdom because of the connectivity for the east of England. Research from the brilliant Essex chamber of commerce, a great champion of strategic infrastructure improvements across Essex that has campaigned and worked with the business community, has shown that 56% of Essex businesses that responded to its survey regularly use the A120. Only the A12 at 82% and the M25 at 72% were used more than the A120. However, the Government know, and have heard not just from me but from successive Members of

[Priti Patel]

Parliament from the east of England over the last decade and more, that the A120 is not fit for purpose. It needs investment to unlock future economic growth and jobs.

The A120 is also a dangerous road. I remember standing here in this Chamber in 2010, denouncing the A120 for being the 10th most dangerous road in the country. The number of fatalities and road accidents that take place on the A120 is simply appalling. In particular, the 12-mile stretch of carriageway between Braintree and Marks Tey has the greatest number of problems. This stretch of the road, which runs mostly through the Witham constituency, is one of the 10 most dangerous in the country. The accidents and fatalities are appalling. Figures produced in 2005 showed up to 25,000 vehicles using that stretch of the road every day, when single-carriage roads should usually carry up to around 20,000. Data published by the Department for Transport in 2010 on annual daily traffic flow suggested that 14% of vehicle movements on the A120 are accounted for by heavy goods vehicles, compared with an average of 6% across Essex. Too many people are getting hurt and injured on this road.

Likewise, too many businesses are haemorrhaging money while they are stuck in delayed traffic. The Minister will know—I do not think anyone in Government needs to be reminded—that Essex is an economic engine and the county of entrepreneurs. Since 2010 the number of entrepreneurs in the county has risen by 25%, from 52,000 to 64,000 and, as the county contributes £40 billion in gross value added to the economy, the economic case for investment in the A120 more than stacks up.

Back in 2008, proposals were put forward to dual the A120 so that we could meet new demands and sort out its dangerous nature; but as the last Labour Government trashed the economy they also spent a lot of time ignoring Essex, and the scheme was scrapped. Since then, colleagues and I have been campaigning with the Essex chambers of commerce, local businesses and the county council to get this back in the Government's in-tray, so I was delighted when the Government and Essex County Council agreed a joint funding package to examine once again the feasibility of upgrading and dualling the A120.

Earlier this month, after route option selection, consultation and considerable analysis and assessment, Essex County Council announced its favoured route, known as route D. This route provides the best benefit to cost rate, at 3.75, of the options considered, and is less disruptive to the environment and existing settlements than other routes. It will also help to take traffic out of villages in my constituency, including Silver End and Bradwell, and could save travel time between Colchester and Braintree in the rush hour. Importantly, it will also be a safer route.

The proposal will bring the A120 from the location known as Galley's Corner—we call it something else that I will not repeat here—through to a new junction with the A12 south of Kelvedon. I appreciate that the favoured route may still have its critics and that, as the proposals progress further, many other issues will need to be addressed, but our county has waited too long for road investment, for this road to be invested in, and for this strategic improvement to take place. We want to see

clear action and leadership when it comes to investment in the A120. That means including the A120 in the second road investment strategy process, RIS2.

To make further progress, more work by Government and further work by Highways England is required. It will come as no surprise to our colleague the Minister that I will continue to press this case, as will all colleagues. While I appreciate that the Minister cannot prejudice the RIS2 process and the selection and prioritisation of routes for investment, the Department will have files, which I have no doubt are substantial, on the economic benefits of investment in the A120 and of the gross value added and the return from investing in Essex.

In discussions with the Treasury over the funding envelope of RIS2, it is fair to say that the Department for Transport can be confident in the economic case, which is part of a strong business case. The current cost estimate is around £555 million, which is an enormous sum. However, we do not speak enough about aggregate returns on investments, and we are talking about a strategic location that supports exports, trade and investment. Upgrading the A120 at the earliest opportunity will bring greater resilience to the economy, to the region and to our country.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when making the business case, it is important to look not only at Essex but at Suffolk? This road is vital to my constituency—connectivity is vital in attracting inward investment—and investing in it will very much help to attract investment to Suffolk, where significant plans are afoot for investment in the energy sector, both at Sizewell and in the offshore wind farms.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Delivering route D will provide £1.1 billion in GVA through new jobs, businesses and housing. It is important that, when looking at the work that we do on transport across our region—on rail, for example—we put forward a coherent business case to the Government for that very purpose. We are an attractive part of the country and we have different sectors that are expanding and growing.

To be up front about this, when we think about our trading options and the economic benefit to the eastern region post Brexit, investing in our roads will enormously benefit Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex. That brings me to asking the Minister to look into not only the A120 but the widening scheme for the A12, which is linked to the A120—these roads cannot be seen in isolation. A failure of successive Governments in the past has been to look at transport and roads as a singular and not a plural, in terms of having an integrated transport strategy.

The Government have already committed to widening parts of the A12 in a three-lane carriageway scheme. Most of the first section to be upgraded—the stretch between the junction 19 Boreham interchange at Chelmsford and junction 25 at Marks Tey—runs through the Witham constituency and is parallel to the great eastern main line. That widening scheme was subject to a consultation by Highways England last year and we are expecting an announcement of the route and the sections to be re-routed.

However, Colchester Borough Council has unfortunately put a spanner in the works at the last minute, as part of its local plan process. I am mindful that I, other colleagues, Highways England and local councils put forward proposals

for the A12 widening scheme—announced back in 2014—that would not be compromised by any work taking place with the local plans. We had that assurance from Highways England and the Department. That widening scheme needs to be re-established alongside the configuration with the A120, and all the councils must be clear with Highways England and the Department. We need to ensure that we again have an integrated approach to the development of our road transport links across Essex and to the facilitation of transport investment across the eastern region.

Essex needs the A120 to be upgraded and the A12 to be dualled. I hope that the Minister can answer fully today. As I said, her Department will have plenty of detailed engagement, work, correspondence and all the files from over the last decade on this, so there is no excuse for the Department not to put forward a coherent approach. The point to make today is that, when it comes to the A120, this is a huge, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to use RIS2 to be much more strategic and to have an integrated roads strategy for the east of England and for Essex.

4.43 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. The A120 has long been in my heart as something needing improvement since well before I became involved in local or national politics.

Driving from my constituency—where we have wonderful beaches; it is a great tourist venue—and going westbound, as my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) said, it becomes completely blocked up at the section between Marks Tey and what we call cholesterol corner. I am sorry that I have to iterate that. Going from my constituency along the A120 has been a regular commute of mine. It sort of peters out beyond Bishop's Stortford, where it goes back to being a two-way road, and then it peters out altogether in the middle of the countryside. The section between Stansted and Harwich is an absolute nightmare and has been for years.

We are now celebrating the decision on a preferred route, in which the A120 will be dualled between Braintree and Marks Tey—or south of Kelvedon, I should say. That is not ideal for me, but it is light years ahead of what we have to put up with now. I commend the application for RIS2 funding for this and I hope the Minister will take it further. It also should not be forgotten, as my hon. Friend mentioned, that the A120 is trans-European network route. It is a curious thing—all the major cities are supposed to be linked, east to west, from Moscow to Dublin. This section of the A120 is part of that, and it is a two-way road. It is nonsense. This is a major step towards realising that ambition.

I take this opportunity to call for further work, further down the line, to complete the A120 in an area that does not go through my constituency but that affects it hugely. My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) knows all about it. It was built in the '70s and it is now crumbling and beginning to fall apart. It needs a renewal, so why not get the whole thing done, from Harwich all the way to Stansted, and finish the job?

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that part of the A120—from Horsley Cross to Parkeston—

which is vital for the economy of north Essex and is crumbling, as he says. However, I believe the Government should be able to say something this afternoon about the Highways Agency activity on that bit of the road and the resources that will be committed to it in the short term, if not the long term.

Giles Watling: My hon. Friend is right. I am delighted to hear that the Government can say something about that section, because it is still holding us up. Cars can still bowl along it at about 55 mph most of the time, but it is still a single lane on either side. It takes forever.

I look forward to our delivering a new, world-beating infrastructure across Britain, east to west, which we need now more than ever. We have not had that over the years. The A14 was improved many years ago, and it is about time the A120 was brought into line, so let us get that infrastructure in place. While I am standing here, I might as well mention that we ought to improve the railways in our area, too.

4.47 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) and all hon. Members who have spoken.

It is timely that my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) has arrived, along with me, to underline that this is about not just Essex, or Suffolk, but the whole of East Anglia. The A120 is a critical road for the eastern region's economy. As I said when I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree, we are a net contributor to the economy, and if the Exchequer puts up a cheque for this road, it will get its money back and then some. That is critical to the case that we are all making.

I will just pick up on a few specific points. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) made the point about the A12, which I wholeheartedly agree with. It would be good to get an update on that. The two roads have to be seen as an integrated project, not least because once trebling has occurred from Chelmsford to Colchester, the next stretch is in south Suffolk, where I can safely say we have possibly the worst junctions to be found in the United Kingdom. Drivers join a very sharp bend at national speed limit, probably in first gear. All I can say is that drivers should check that they have life insurance before they do so. I actually took the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), to see that, and he was struck by the danger it presented. I think we often underestimate the safety issue for all these projects. My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree made that key point—this is dangerous; it is not just about the economics.

However, the business case will be about the economics, and while there is obviously an understandable focus on housing, we have to emphasise the extent to which the road can drive serious industry, exporting and services—not least with the airport. I do not want young people in my constituency just to get on a train to London to try to find a good job; I want them to have opportunity at home, in the local region. At the moment, to go from Sudbury, the biggest town in my constituency, to Stansted

[James Cartlidge]

is just beyond commuting distance. If we improve the road, we can get it within commuting distance and the thousands of vacancies can be filled with people from the local workforce. I therefore endorse what has been said so far. The economic case is strong, and I urge the Government to consider it wholeheartedly.

4.50 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) on securing this debate on a hugely important topic—a stretch of road that is hugely important to so many of our constituencies across the eastern region.

The A120 does not, in fact, touch my constituency at all, yet it is hugely important to it and to its future prosperity. In the past few years, tens of thousands of homes have been built in Colchester, but without adequate or appropriate transport infrastructure to support them. We have had the housing but we have not had the roads, locally or regionally, to support that massive growth. In fact, ours has been the fastest-growing town in the country for some time.

My hon. Friend made a very valid point when he asked whether there could be another road in the country that links a growing international airport and an international port, which is also growing, by a road that is single track in some parts. It gets so congested that people can get stuck behind a slow-moving vehicle and it can delay their journey by a considerable amount of time, and yet the road is of major strategic importance.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) made a valid point about the economic case. That is not in question. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk so eloquently made the point that the Government will see a return on this investment and then some. We know that because Essex and the eastern region are already powerhouses for the British economy.

James Cleverly: Does my hon. Friend agree that not only will there be an economic return on investment in this road, but, because of the particular nature of the local and regional economy, the return on investment in the road will be greater and quicker than those on similar investments in other road projects around the country?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; I could not agree more. I have touched on the international airport and the port, but there is so much more. Colchester, which is sandwiched between those two important infrastructure projects, is hugely important in terms of business growth. The University of Essex, which is just across in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) but hugely important to both our constituencies, is growing and contributing to huge amounts of business growth; it is attracting businesses to the area.

We know that this is coming. There are plans, as part of the garden settlement movement—that is a debate for another day—for a business park larger than the

biggest business park, in Cambridge. If we get it right and if we get the transport infrastructure piece right, this will be a prosperity corridor, stretching from Stansted airport to the port of Harwich, and we can benefit from that.

Priti Patel: Does my hon. Friend share my view that there is an opportunity through investment in the A120 but also our wider road network—and, in fact, our railway lines—when it comes to the wider transport and infrastructure approach, and that Departments should be working in a much more joined-up way? He has already touched on planning; this is a question of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Treasury and the Department for Transport working on a holistic and coherent case.

Will Quince: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. I could not agree more that we do not have a holistic approach at the moment and, as a result, people are not seeing the bigger picture and the prize that is on offer.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for letting me make this point. On joined-up thinking, does he agree that resolving the issues on the A12 is also part of the bigger-picture solution? Unlocking the issues on the A120 is key to unlocking the improvement on the A12, which we also need in order to ensure that Essex is better connected.

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. It is almost as though she has read my mind, because in my response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham, I intended to make exactly the point that the A120 cannot be seen on its own, in isolation, as the panacea. It is not the whole answer, but it is part of an overall picture that includes the A12; that is why the extra lane is so important between Chelmsford and Colchester—and beyond, up into Suffolk. This is also about our rail line, and we need to get this right. We have a whole fleet of new trains starting to arrive next year on the Great Eastern main line. If we start to unlock the additional capacity that will come with the digital railway—if we start to see that investment from the Department for Transport via Network Rail in our rail line—all of a sudden we will become a real powerhouse, because through transport infrastructure we open up economic opportunities and business growth. In particular, Colchester, but also wider Essex and the eastern region, will be the place to invest and the place to relocate a business to. The size of the prize is so great—it is a huge opportunity—and the Government really should sit up and listen to us about it. If Departments work together on housing, transport infrastructure and beyond, and if they work with us, the opportunities are huge.

My final point is not just about the economic case, but about why this scheme is so important to the region. That is clear to see, because of the overwhelming and clear support from everybody—and I mean everybody. Borough, district and county councils, the local enterprise partnership, businesses and business groups—such as the chambers of commerce—are absolutely invested in it. They have been so invested in it that they have put in money, resource, time and effort. We all know from our postbags the number of people who contact their Member of Parliament about issues with the A120 and how keen they are to see those issues resolved.

Whether it is about the economic and business case, the social impact on our constituencies or just the fact that we need to connect a major international airport, a major international port and a very important town in the middle—Colchester—we have to ensure that the A120 scheme goes ahead. I encourage the Government to stump up the cash to make it happen.

4.56 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Mr Hollobone. I thank all hon. Members for their considered contributions to this important debate, and not least the hon. Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) for initiating it. I think we can agree that the case made by all hon. Members was very compelling. The link between the port and airport serving Essex is at the heart of the economic strategy presented today. The economic opportunity that such an enterprise corridor could deliver, in terms of real growth in the region, has been cited by some to be worth as much as £1.3 billion, I have read, and all for a cost of £555 million in its creation. It is clear that domiciliary development is occurring, and that brings an opportunity to see industrial investment to provide jobs for those communities as well as the wider economy. Clearly, where such development takes place, there has to be well developed transport infrastructure, but that certainly is not currently the case, especially at some of the pinch points on the A120 route where there is significant congestion.

Giles Watling: Does the hon. Lady agree that it is not only industrial development—manufacturing and so on—that would benefit from this scheme and that there is a massive tourism offer? I am thinking of the wonderful beaches of the east coast. At Parkeston Quay, we have so many cruise ships that come in every year. It is a pity that the people who arrive there have to struggle with our dreadful infrastructure to get to other parts of the country such as London and across to the central midlands.

Rachael Maskell: I agree that tourism is a really important consideration when we are looking at infrastructure investment. It should be at the heart of the wider discussions and seen as an economic piece all by itself.

The debate on how the A120 can be improved to alleviate much of the congestion has been a long time coming. Five options were originally presented. I appreciate that those have been whittled down to four, and option D has been favoured by Essex County Council as the preferred route for the new A120. I also note that option C, interestingly, would see approximately one third of the route bifurcating Bradwell quarry and therefore would relieve some of the environmental impact should that scheme go ahead. We must also note the importance of farmland and agribusiness. In the Government's planning of development, whether rail or road, they should take on board the need to ensure fertile land is maintained for the purposes of growing our food. I know there is much debate on that point.

The second compelling case made by the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) was about road safety. With 53 fatalities and 325 serious injuries on this stretch, it is clear that not intervening would allow those risks to continue. That is a serious consideration.

It is worth saying, however, that we cannot look at road improvement without looking at intermodal and alternative modes of transport, and seeing the improvements that can be brought in from other schemes—particularly our rail, but also other forms of transport—in serving communities. While I understand that all hon. Members are trying to promote their local scheme for RIS2, I say to the Minister that we need to look at intermodal options before we look at road. It appears we have shifted to a road-first policy, as opposed to looking at public transport as the preferred option. Evidence from Newbury, Blackburn, Lincoln and other similar cases has shown how induced capacity is having a serious impact on their local economies, so we have to be careful as we make these decisions and look at them in an integrated-transport way.

James Cartlidge: Looking at alternative modes is a fair point, which I hear about all the time. The issue we have is lorries. In our modern economy, all our goods have to go through lorries, from Felixstowe or whatever port. It is coming down on HGVs. It is very hard to get that on to rail when it is at capacity, even though we have a good freight service. Does the hon. Lady agree that that is where there is a shortcoming in alternative forms of transport?

Rachael Maskell: I agree, there is a challenge with the use of freight. It creates an opportunity, however, to put the focus back on putting freight on to rail. We are already 45,000 lorry drivers short in our economy. How we expand rail freight, therefore, is a serious consideration, in order to see that fast through-put of freight. That is something to which we have given much thought and attention.

Where there have been road-widening schemes, after 20 years we have seen induced capacity building congestion again, with an increase as high as 45%. Out of 25 projects only five have delivered the economic benefits that were promised. We need to ensure that everything is thoroughly tested before investment is made.

Will Quince: I apologise for the slight delay in jumping to my feet, but I was a little surprised by what I think the hon. Lady might have said. Did she say that under a future Labour Government, the A120 development would not go ahead?

Rachael Maskell: I most definitely did not say that. The hon. Gentleman must have misheard me. I emphasised the focus we need to put on intermodal transport in particular, looking at issues such as increasing capacity on our rail networks, because we know other serious challenges are afoot across our freight industry. It is important we take those considerations on board.

Vicky Ford: I have campaigned for rail freight for many years. Is the hon. Lady aware that Chelmsford is the busiest two-platform train station in the country and there simply is not additional space to take additional freight down the great eastern main line in the timeframe involved? Digital networks may add a bit more, but we need to resolve the freight by mending this road and our road networks, not just by saying, "Let's get it on the trains."

Rachael Maskell: There are choices to be made. I am saying that we invest either in road or in rail. Looking at investment is part of what is called for by the freight industry.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Rachael Maskell: If I may, I will finish my point. The Rail Freight Group, which I meet with regularly, has identified how those east-west connections need serious investment. If we want to develop Harwich as a port and see Felixstowe thrive as well, in order to take freight from the east into the west, it is important that we do not dismiss those opportunities and see that proper investment.

Will Quince: The hon. Lady is being gracious in giving way. It is not a binary choice between rail and road. We can and must have investment in both. She said that intermodal schemes should be a priority over roads. This is not an intermodal scheme. Therefore, is she saying that the Labour party would not prioritise the dualling of the A120?

Rachael Maskell: I have already answered the hon. Gentleman. I said that we would have an intermodal approach to all transport systems. It is crucial that we look at the opportunity that public transport can provide.

Vicky Ford: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rachael Maskell: If I may move on a little, we will see what time there is left. It is important that our approach to strategically developing economic growth, transport planning and housing development brings all development and planning together. We have seen a piecemeal approach to planning, which has not looked at how to serve economic or residential communities and ensure that there are sufficient transport mechanisms to provide that support. We believe that truly sustainable economic and residential hubs need to work together with the integrated transport system in order to best serve communities. We know that in the developments that have taken place, 81% of people living in those areas drive to work, as opposed to having wider options and intermodal choices. That is what I am arguing today.

Vicky Ford: The hon. Lady said the Labour party would invest in either rail or road. This Government are committed to investing in both. Which is she planning to cut?

Rachael Maskell: The hon. Lady is again taking my words and not using them in the way they were said. We will look at intermodal first and at the wider options of ensuring properly integrated transport. Any Government should do that, to ensure that we have the most sustainable and usable rail, bus, active travel and road system that there is. Intermodal integration will give us the best transportation system. Talk to anyone across the transport sector: they would agree with that approach, as do many Government Ministers, who say that they want to see an intermodal shift, too. I have heard such words many times from the Government. I am sure they would agree that is also important, if they are looking at proper economic and residential investment, such as is being suggested by the scheme presented today. That is the approach Labour would take.

We need to ensure that improvements made today do not call for further improvements and widening just a few years down the road, as has happened in many of these schemes. We need long-term solutions and investment put in place, to ensure there is not chaos in the future.

Giles Watling: The hon. Lady is being gracious in giving way. Is she suggesting that people would give up taking their cars to their holiday destination? That is an essential part, in many cases, of a holiday in the UK, so that people can explore the countryside.

Rachael Maskell: I am not suggesting that at all. I am talking about intermodal choice, which is important. Going forward, people need to have real options in how they travel, whether for work or leisure. We want to see those choices expanded. Many people at the moment, as I highlighted, have such limited choices that they have no option but to use the car. If we truly are to make the intermodal shift, we need to see more options being made available for commuters and people travelling for leisure.

James Cleverly: Unfortunately, the hon. Lady has missed quite a fundamental point and I will reinforce it, if not for her benefit then for the ears of the Minister. This proposal is not about taking existing transport patterns and just making them happen on an improved road. What this proposal is about is unlocking residential and employment opportunities within the region, so that people are not forced to drive or take the train to London, for example, to get good-quality work. So the idea behind this proposal is to develop sustainable communities and sustainable economic activities in and around the region itself, reducing the need for long and polluting journeys, and increasing the opportunities for people to work close to where they live, where their children go to school and where they have amenities around them.

Rachael Maskell: I fully understand the scheme; I have read it in much detail. That is why I am making the case that it is so important that we give people real choice.

In my closing remarks—

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Lady give way very briefly?

Rachael Maskell: Very briefly, then.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady. Will she just give an assurance that the Labour party supports the dualling of the A120 all the way from Colchester to Parkeston, which is a stretch of road that is long overdue for dualling?

Rachael Maskell: I think I have made myself perfectly clear in today's debate, with all due respect. What I have said is that we believe that we should have a fully integrated, intermodal approach to transportation, which, as I have—

James Cartlidge: Yes or no?

Will Quince *rose*—

Rachael Maskell: I will not take the hon. Gentleman's intervention. [*Interruption.*] No, it is not a no.

As I have said—

Vicky Ford: It is not a yes.

Rachael Maskell: As I have said in this debate, we need to look at that intermodal option and that has not been presented in the case that I have read. Clearly, we need to see investment across all our modes of transport, so that hon. Members' constituents have real choice over how they travel and so they do not have to take the car if it is their preference to take a bus or train. That is what I am saying. We have got to see integrated—

James Cartlidge: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rachael Maskell: May I finish my sentence? So that we can see an integrated approach to how we assess transport projects in the future, rather than looking at the silos of rail over here, and road over there, which is the approach taken at the moment, as we know, because the RIS process is completely segregated from the control period, and we want to see a real integrated approach. That is the point that I have made throughout the debate.

James Cartlidge *rose*—

Will Quince: Will the hon. Lady give way again? She has been very kind.

Rachael Maskell: I see two hon. Members. If it is going to be a completely different point that will be made—[*Interruption.*] If it is not a completely different point, I will not give way. I will not keep repeating what I have said, so I will just bring my remarks to a close.

It is really important that we consider how we can build sustainability into the long-term future. That is why we want to put the resources and support behind a truly intermodal approach to transportation, but not just transportation in isolation. We want to integrate that across all planning, including economic and residential planning, so that all of our constituents have real choice as to how they travel to work and for leisure.

5.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Mr Hollobone, it is an honour to serve under your chairmanship.

No doubt my colleagues have realised that I am not 6 feet 4 inches, so I am not the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), who is the Minister with responsibility for roads. However, I will do my best to respond to all the questions put today and no doubt Department officials will write to answer any questions that are not responded to.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) on securing this debate about upgrading the A120 in Essex. He has made a strong case for the economic benefits of upgrading the A120. Other hon. Members, in particular my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), also spoke, about

not only the economic benefits that would be opened up but the business case, the residential case and the case for tourism, which was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling).

We know that transport is a key driver of the economy and an improved network will provide better journeys and boost local growth, productivity and opportunities. I agree with all of the representations that have been made here today and no doubt the Department is listening very closely, especially to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham, who has been banging this drum for eight years—nearly a decade—and I do not doubt that there are reams of paper about the correspondence and meetings that she has had with the Department over those many long years.

James Cartlidge: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for giving way and for her support. Was she shocked, as we all were, that today the Labour party was unable to commit to supporting explicitly the dualling of the A120? Does she agree that we can talk about choice, but in the real world, where our constituents live, they do not have a choice? We cannot move goods, other than a small proportion, down rail; they will continue to be moved on HGVs for a long time. People may not like that, but that is the real world in which we have to plan our roads today.

Ms Ghani: It has been a very passionate debate and I was also slightly startled that the Labour party representative today, the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), could not bring herself to recognise that Essex is a gem of a county in economic development and somehow was taking away choice, by removing the opportunity to invest in road infrastructure, let alone in tourism, business, residential or economic development in the future. However, these debates sometimes bring out surprising results.

Will Quince: Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister could outline, in response to some of the comments made by the shadow Transport Minister, the urgency of this situation, because if this road is not in the next road investment scheme or RIS2, and goes back to the drawing board, how long would that set us back? More than that, does she think that that would be a slap in the face for all of those people who have worked so hard together, over years, to put this road scheme forward, and to promote it and push it? It would be a slap in the face for all those people to say, "Back to the drawing board—not good enough".

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend mentioned the phrase "slap in the face" a number of times; I am not sure how I can respond to that. However, the Labour party is not even putting this scheme on the drawing board; it will not even consider it. No doubt, that will be absolutely frightening for hon. Members' constituents to hear.

I do not want to prejudice the outcome of the road investment strategy 2 process, but I hope that what I will go on to say later in the speech will provide some succour to the Members who are here today and their constituents. However, I was surprised just as much as my hon. Friend was that the Labour party will not even consider this scheme in the future.

[*Ms Ghani*]

In December 2014, the Government launched the first road investment strategy—RIS1—which outlines how £15.2 billion will be invested in our strategic roads between 2015 and 2021. This is the biggest upgrade to our strategic roads in a generation. It includes the widening of the A12. Many Members said we need to approach this work holistically: my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham; and my hon. Friends the Members for South Suffolk, for Braintree, for Colchester (Will Quince) and for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). They understood that both these schemes—for the A120 and the A12—need to be linked, so I will just touch on the A12 first.

The proposed work will include the widening of the A12 between junction 19 at Chelmsford and junction 25 at Marks Tey, where the A12 currently joins the A120. We have also provided funding for smaller scale safety improvements. On the A120 east of the A12, at the Hare Green junction with the A133 to Clacton, Highways England has commenced construction of a new £3 million roundabout to improve road safety. Work there is expected to be concluded by the end of this year.

The Government continue to invest in improvements to rail infrastructure in Essex and Department officials continue to work closely with local partners to identify local transport improvements. The South East local enterprise partnership, which includes Essex, has secured £590 million from the three rounds of the local growth fund, supporting projects, including transport schemes, that facilitate economic growth and housing. It has enabled key schemes in the county to be taken forward, such as an investment of £16 million towards improvements on the A127, and an investment of over £70 million towards the widening of the A13 in Thurrock. Both those routes are seen as key routes in Essex.

We recognise the importance of the A120 as a key part of the wider transport network, including all the other benefits that it brings, such as tourism, housing and business. The A120 is a key east-west route connecting areas across the region from the port of Harwich to Stansted airport. It links the east of England to the midlands and the north, so is of national as well as regional importance.

The single carriageway section between Braintree and the A12 near Colchester is currently a bottleneck on the route. Heavy traffic is a burden on the towns and villages that it passes through. That is why we have provided £4 million to Essex County Council as a contribution to the development work for the proposed improvement scheme. I am very grateful to the council for the excellent work it has done to develop these proposals and take them through a non-statutory public consultation on a range of options.

The proposed scheme would support the plans for new housing and growth in the area, in particular the proposed development at Marks Tey. This will boost the economy in Essex and beyond. It will complement the widening of the A12 between Chelmsford and Marks Tey, which we are currently developing as part of RIS1.

Priti Patel: I thank the Minister for being very generous both in her remarks and in giving way. She touched on the A12 widening scheme, and I want to re-emphasise my earlier point on that. That road's development has

been put on hold because of the development of the local plan in Colchester. We were told that categorically about five weeks ago, having previously been told that all planning factors had been considered. I know that the Minister responding to the debate is not the Minister for roads, but perhaps her officials will take away that I would like a meeting with that Minister and with Highways England to find out what on earth is going on. It seems crazy to advance the A120 without the A12. We need to integrate much more this whole way of working, and I again make my plea that all three Departments I named earlier come together on the issue.

Ms Ghani: My right hon. Friend has been a strong campaigner for her constituency, particularly on this issue, and I do not doubt that her request for a meeting will be respected and taken forward. I understand that there was a delay and that the notification of it was made most recently.

The favoured option for the A120 scheme that the council announced on 8 June is supported by a strong analytical assessment and has gained support from both the public and the business community, providing a good case for its consideration as a candidate for inclusion in the second road investment strategy. I cannot comment enough on the strong representations made not only by those Members of Parliament here today but by others who have met repeatedly with the Department for Transport: my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) and my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mrs Badenoch). Strong cases have been made, not only within this debate but behind the scenes, in lobbying the Department for Transport.

We are currently developing an affordable, deliverable investment plan for the strategic road network—the SRN—for the period 2020-25. The work draws on two years of research and public engagement. For example, Highways England has refreshed its 18 route strategies, which cover the whole of its network and present a high-level view of both performance and constraints on the existing road network. The route strategy for the east of England identified a number of capacity and safety issues on the A120, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham mentioned.

In December 2017, Highways England published its initial SRN report, which set out its proposed priorities for RIS2 and looked at the strategic road network as a whole rather than suggesting specific enhancements. The Department consulted on the document over the winter and we are using the responses to shape our thinking as we develop the next road investment strategy. Essex County Council's work in developing the A120 scheme is also feeding into the process.

Our consultation on RIS2 has confirmed the considerable competition for the funding available for new schemes. A great deal of evidence arguing for a range of investments was received, including responses in favour of the A120 upgrade, among other things. There was also support for the schemes that were included in RIS1 for development for RIS2—the A12 Colchester bypass widening and the A12/M25 to Chelmsford improvement. All those proposals are being considered for inclusion in RIS2, alongside others from across the country. I cannot prejudice the process and the outcome, but the Government will announce their final decisions on RIS2 in 2019. Strong

representations regarding the business case, as well as the cases in support of homes, the social environment and tourism, have been made today.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree and other Members are reassured that the Government understand the importance of the A120 scheme, both in the region and nationally, and that we see the need for investment in transport infrastructure to provide much needed economic growth. We will take that into account as we finalise our plans for the next road investment strategy.

5.23 pm

James Cleverly: I thank the Minister for her comments. What I take away is that although she was careful not to prejudice her Department's decision, and we completely understand that she is duty bound to go no further than she has, I think I speak for all Members representing the A120 route and the region when I say that we are pleased to hear that, on behalf of the Department, she recognises the strategic importance of the road, the economic opportunity that improvements would unlock and, perhaps on a personal note, the passion of all of us in the room. Although it is always iniquitous to single out individuals, I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) have been fighting this fight for a very long time. If for nothing more than their sanity, I urge the Minister to take back the message to the Department that the passion overflows among regional MPs.

It is disappointing beyond belief that where we have geographical unanimity we seem not to have been able to get as reassuring a set of noises from the shadow

Minister. To say that her response was lukewarm would be an exaggeration beyond my capabilities. Therefore, we rely on the good offices of the Minister and the Department to turn what I believe is a genuinely held recognition of the road's problems—the congestion, the danger and the negative impact on the ability of businesses to maximise their potential in what is already a great part of the country to do business but which could be so much better—into a relatively modest investment in the A120.

I thank the Minister for listening intently and for what I know she will do next, which is to take the passion of the Members present back to the Department and reinforce the case that has been made by us, by local government at both district and county level, by local businesses and by groups such as the A120 campaign, to which we all subscribe and give our energies. If ultimately we are successful in securing the funding to improve the road, I give the Minister our collective guarantee that we will personally hand over the large bags of cash that will inevitably flow from the investment into Treasury coffers, to be deployed in the great work that public expenditure does around the country.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): There have been no hold-ups or congestion today, and we are finishing within the scheduled time.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the proposal to dual the A120.

5.27 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 19 June 2018

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Media

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock): On 5 June I made a statement to the House in which I set out my decision in relation to the proposed merger between 21st Century Fox and Sky.

I announced that having considered the CMA's report, I agreed with its findings on the public interest grounds and its finding that undertakings to divest Sky News to Disney or to an alternative suitable buyer could potentially remedy the adverse plurality public interest concerns identified.

I also noted that there remained a number of issues with the undertakings that had been offered and that these would require discussions between my officials and the parties in order to reach agreement on an acceptable form of the remedy.

Following the successful conclusion of these discussions and the resolution of these issues, I am today publishing updated undertakings offered by 21st Century Fox along with new undertakings offered by Disney for the divestment of Sky News to Disney.

These undertakings are offered on improved terms and will include:

- a commitment from Disney to operate and maintain a Sky News branded news service for 15 years rather than 10 years
- a restriction on Disney from selling Sky News for 15 years without the consent of the Secretary of State
- an extension of the funding commitment from 21st Century Fox from 10 years to 15 years
- an increase in the total funds available to Sky News, to at least £100 million per year, with operating costs protected in real terms; and
- a formal commitment from Disney to preserve the editorial independence of Sky News

In my view, these revised undertakings meet the criteria that I set out to the House on 5 June and will help to ensure that Sky News remains financially viable over the long term; is able to operate as a major UK-based news provider; and is able to take its editorial decisions independently, free from any potential outside influence.

Under the legislation, I am required to consult formally for 15 days on the undertakings, which I propose to accept. Views as to whether these proposals are sufficient to remedy the adverse plurality public interest concerns raised by this merger are sought by 5pm on Wednesday 4 July 2018. The consultation can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sky-fox-merger-proposed-undertakings-by-21st-century-fox-inc-and-the-walt-disney-company>.

[HCWS7758]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

FCO Services

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): FCO Services operates as a trading fund of the FCO. I have set it the following performance targets for 2018-2019:

A return on capital employed of at least 3.5% (statutory commitment).

An in-year surplus before financing and dividend costs.

A productivity ratio of at least 80%, measuring actual billable hours vs. available billable hours.

A customer satisfaction result of at least 80%.

A Your Say score for "Employee Engagement" measuring above 58%.

A Your Say score for "My Manager", measuring above 62%.

FCO Services will report to Parliament on its success against these targets through its annual report and accounts for 2018-2019.

FCO Services is a trading fund of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). It provides a range of integrated, secure services worldwide to the FCO and other UK Government Departments, supporting the delivery of Government agendas. Services include protective security, estates and construction, cloud computing, communications and monitoring, logistics, translation and interpreting. This is combined with a portfolio of global maintenance work. FCO services also manages the UK National Authority for Counter Eavesdropping (UK NACE), helping protect UK assets from physical, electronic and cyber-attack.

[HCWS773]

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): My noble Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon), has made the following written ministerial statement:

On the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict and as the Prime Minister's special representative on this issue, I wish to inform the House of the next steps for the UK's preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative (PSVI) ahead of a UK-hosted international meeting in November 2019.

Four years on from the UK hosted global summit to end sexual violence in conflict in June 2014, the scale of these crimes remains truly appalling. UK leadership since then has secured the international political attention that preventing sexual violence in conflict rightly deserves. Our collaboration with partners is essential to ensure this remains the case. Recent examples include a joint visit I made with UN special representative of the Secretary-General Pramila Patten to Iraq in February to shine a spotlight on the need for accountability for survivors of sexual violence and an end to the stigma they face. During a visit to Mosul, I saw for myself the awful devastation Daesh has had on people's lives and livelihoods, especially for women and girls, including through sexual slavery and forced marriage.

Our political drive has also been backed up by wide-ranging practical support, through ground-breaking work such as the development of the international protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict. Its second iteration, launched last year, is now being used by the International Criminal Court, the UN and in countries as diverse as Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Burma, DRC, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Uganda. Since 2012, £44 million of UK funding has been allocated to support over 70 projects in 26 countries to provide capacity building on advocacy, protection, survivor support, evidence gathering, judicial reform, prosecution and reparations work. We have also seen our team of PSVI experts deployed more than 90 times to provide support and training on a range of issues from documenting crimes to rehabilitating survivors. We know this support and assistance has had real impact and is delivering real change on the ground.

Implementing and galvanising effective action to bring perpetrators to account, to tackle stigma and to prevent sexual violence in conflict remains a high priority for the UK. We will continue to use our influence to rally sustained international action and push this issue up the global agenda.

Therefore, the UK will host an international meeting on PSVI in 2019, marking five years since the global summit to end sexual violence in conflict. This meeting will seek to achieve a number of outcomes. These include progress on accountability and tackling the culture of impunity; addressing sensitive issues such as support for children born of rape and male, LGBT and disabled survivors; the role of media organisations and faith leaders in tackling survivor stigma; and, working with armed forces to prevent conflict-related sexual violence.

To deliver on this ambition, the UK will work to strengthen both our bilateral and multilateral levels with international partners to secure commitments and make progress on this agenda between now and November 2019. This will include an event at the UN General Assembly in September and a PSVI film festival this November. We have already engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including PSVI champion and focus countries and fellow Commonwealth member states. International organisations remain key partners, such as the office of the UN special representative of the Secretary-General, Pramila Patten; UNFPA; OHCHR and the ICRC. We will uphold the spirit of PSVI and reach out to British and global civil society, parliamentarians and the public.

Staying true to the principles for global action on tackling stigma, we will place survivors at the heart of our collective work.

In 2014, we told the world that it was time to act, now is the time to deliver upon that pledge.

I will keep the House informed of progress on this work.

[HCWS772]

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: UK Delegation

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): The hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) has been appointed as a full member of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in place of the right hon. Member for Birmingham Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne).

[HCWS774]

Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 19 June 2018

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Draft Scotland Act 2016 and Wales Act 2017 (Onshore Petroleum) (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2018

The following is an extract from the Second Delegated Legislation Committee on the Draft Scotland Act 2016 and Wales Act 2017 (Onshore Petroleum) (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2018 on 4 June 2018.

Claire Perry: I am told that the Territorial Sea Act sets baselines and that within 12 nautical miles is regarded as onshore. [*Official Report, Second Delegated Legislation Committee, 4 June 2018, c. 8.*]

Letter of correction from Claire Perry:

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) in Second Delegated Legislation Committee on 4 June.

The correct response should have been:

Claire Perry: I am told that the Territorial Sea Act sets baselines and that within **those baselines** is regarded as onshore.

EDUCATION

National Funding Formula: Social Mobility

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on the National Funding Formula: Social Mobility on 22 May 2018.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: The Minister is talking about fairness and equity in the system, but what does he say to a school in the north-east that, according to the National Education Union, is set to lose £8,000 per pupil? How is that fair?

Nick Gibb: What the NEU is doing with its school cuts campaign is misleading. It is taking the cost pressures that we have acknowledged and telling the public that those are funding cuts. I have been clear that no school has had a funding cut. School funding went up in real terms per pupil in the last Parliament, and that increase has been maintained in real terms.

[*Official Report, 22 May 2018, Vol. 641, c. 326WH.*]

Letter of correction from Nick Gibb:

An error has been identified in the response given to the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) in the Westminster Hall debate.

Nick Gibb: What the NEU is doing with its school cuts campaign is misleading. It is taking the cost pressures that we have acknowledged and telling the public that those are funding cuts. I have been clear that no school has had a funding cut. School funding went up in real terms per pupil **between 2010 and 2015. Since then, funding** has been maintained in real terms.

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on the National Funding Formula: Social Mobility on 22 May 2018.

Layla Moran: Does the Minister understand the frustration not just of the teaching profession but of parents? I am a governor at one of the schools in Oxfordshire that he mentioned. Perhaps he is suggesting that the board of governors and I are not managing our money or resources properly. I assure him that we are doing everything we can for this issue not to affect frontline services, but it does. My question is simple: does the Minister accept that although he can spout numbers—it is true; these are facts—the reality on the ground in schools such as Botley Primary School in my constituency is that teachers are at breaking point, and parents are beginning to see the real effects of the cost pressures that are played off against the increases in funding that the Minister lists?

Nick Gibb: We have to live within our budget, and the Treasury has to work with the tax receipts it receives and deal with the historic budget deficit it inherited. Somebody has to lend the state that money, and they would not lend us £150 billion every year if we showed no sign of reducing that figure to something more manageable and did not plan ultimately to eliminate it altogether. That is what is happening. That is why we have a strong economy and the lowest level of unemployment for 40 years, why there are opportunities for young people to have a job once they leave our school system, and why fewer children are living in workless households. That is all part of how to manage the public sector in a serious way, which is what the Government have been doing since 2010. That is why we have been able to maintain school funding in real terms over that period, spend £23 billion on capital funding for schools, and fund an increase of 825,000 school places to deal with the increasing pupil population.

[*Official Report, 22 May 2018, Vol. 641, c. 328WH.*]

Letter of correction from Nick Gibb:

An error has been identified in the response given to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) in the Westminster Hall debate.

Nick Gibb: We have to live within our budget, and the Treasury has to work with the tax receipts it receives and deal with the historic budget deficit it inherited. Somebody has to lend the state that money, and they would not lend us £150 billion every year if we showed no sign of reducing that figure to something more manageable and did not plan ultimately to eliminate it altogether. That is what is happening. That is why we have a strong economy and the lowest level of unemployment for 40 years, why there are opportunities for young people to have a job once they leave our school system, and why fewer children are living in workless households. That is all part of how to manage the public sector in a serious way, which is what the Government have been doing since 2010. That is why we have been able to maintain school funding in real terms over that period, **invest £23 billion on capital funding for schools between 2016-17 and 2020-21**, and fund an increase of 825,000 school places to deal with the increasing pupil population.

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