

**Wednesday  
27 June 2018**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 27 June 2018**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 27 June 2018*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER AND MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE

*The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister  
for the Cabinet Office was asked—*

#### Outsourcing: Value for Money

1. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the value for money of outsourcing public services. [906085]

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington):** Recent business cases submitted by Departments for approval show savings to taxpayers from outsourcing in the range of 9% to 30%.

**Afzal Khan:** A recent Public Accounts Committee report found that after more than 25 years the Treasury still has no data on whether the private finance initiative model provides value for money. People in my constituency are concerned about back-door privatisation and the kinds of PFI contract often used in hospitals, which leave staff in the dark, not knowing about the security of their jobs. Will the Minister review PFI contracts and privatisation across all Departments in the light of the PAC report's findings?

**Mr Lidington:** Let us consider this:

"It simply would not have been possible to build or refurbish such a number of schools and hospitals without using the PFI model."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2007; Vol. 467, c. 665.] Those are not my words, but those of Gordon Brown, the last Labour Prime Minister.

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend might be aware of a petition in Gibraltar for it to have an MP elected to our Parliament. The petition now has close to 10,000 signatures, which is almost half the electorate of the rock. Will he therefore consider backing my private Member's Bill to give Gibraltar the option of electing an MP to this place and reward Gibraltarians for their unwavering loyalty?

**Mr Speaker:** That is an extreme case of shoehorning in a particular concern, but it suffers from the disadvantage of bearing absolutely no relation to the question on the Order Paper. The hon. Gentleman has made his point

in his own inimitable and mildly eccentric way, and we are grateful to him for doing so. Let us have a question that is in order.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): On a serious point, many of my constituents were affected by the collapse of Carillion. How confident is the Minister that the big four accountancy firms have learnt their lessons for the future?

**Mr Lidington:** Clearly, criticisms have been made of the major accountancy firms by Select Committees of this House and others. The appropriate financial services regulator keeps this under review, and it is for the regulator to decide what, if any, steps to take.

**Jon Trickett** (Hemsworth) (Lab): With 2,300 jobs down the pan and the taxpayer paying £148 million to clean up the Carillion fiasco, how can the Minister give such complacent responses on value for money? Will he now admit that earlier Front-Bench assurances from those on his side of the House that the burden of Carillion's collapse would not fall on the taxpayer have turned out to be incorrect?

**Mr Lidington:** No, I would not accept that at all. We have said from the start that our priority has been to keep public services running. We have paid the costs of the official receiver to enable the contracted operations to continue; the schools have been cleaned, and the meals have been served in schools and hospitals, by those providers. It is the lenders, directors and shareholders in Carillion who have taken the big financial hit, and rightly so.

**Jon Trickett:** The fact of the matter is that the Minister has admitted that £150 million has been paid to the liquidators. We see that his commitment to value for money has no credibility when we consider that only one civil servant is monitoring 700 taxpayer-funded contracts, with £60 billion in assets. The Government are sleepwalking from one outsourcing disaster to the next. Will he now accept the widespread public view that he should abandon his obsession with outsourcing?

**Mr Lidington:** The report by the Select Committee on Work and Pensions and the Select Committee on Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy concluded that the directors, not the Government, were responsible for the fact that Carillion failed and that the Government had made a competent job of clearing up the mess. I refer the hon. Gentleman again to the fact that independent research commissioned by the last Labour Government showed savings to taxpayers of, on average, between 20% and 30% from outsourcing, compared with undertaking tasks in house. That is money that can go back into frontline public services.

#### Voter ID Pilots

2. **Adam Holloway** (Gravesham) (Con): Whether he has made an assessment of the operation of recent voter ID pilots; and if he will make a statement.

[906086]

7. **James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Whether he has made an assessment of the operation of recent voter ID pilots; and if he will make a statement.

[906091]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):** We are encouraged by the data from the returning officers and the statements they have made indicating that the pilots were a successful test of the implementation of voter ID. The Electoral Commission will publish its evaluation in July and the Cabinet Office will conclude its own evaluation at the same time.

**Adam Holloway:** Does the Minister agree that additional measures should be brought in, given that the issue affects the vulnerable, the elderly and, in my constituency, ethnic minorities?

**Chloe Smith:** I welcome my hon. Friend's commitment, which I share, to helping voters to be able to cast their ballots in a way that also protects the integrity of the wider system. Let us never forget that that is not only an individual advantage, but in the collective interest.

**James Morris:** Following the recent trials in this year's local elections, the Minister will be aware that local authorities such as Woking recorded a 99.7% success rate on voters bringing the correct ID. Does she agree that that demonstrates that we should consider rolling this out further to secure the integrity of the ballot?

**Chloe Smith:** What my hon. Friend says is absolutely the case. The measures that we piloted at the local elections just past were reasonable and proportionate and have been shown to have worked. Furthermore, other countries already do this without problem. The overwhelming majority of people were able to cast their votes in these pilots without any issue. I look forward to considering the best next steps, informed by those pilots.

**Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab):** What problems were there with the pilots?

**Chloe Smith:** I am sure that the Electoral Commission will provide those who look for problems with a little bit of data to chew on, but the point is this: it seems to me that the Labour party is looking for problems. Actually, most voters regard this as a reasonable and sensible step that protects our democracy.

**Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP):** We agree about the importance of preventing voter fraud and other electoral malpractice. The Electoral Commission ruled that Leave.EU breached spending limits and other rules, fined the organisation and reported its responsible person to the police. What steps are the Government taking to address that and how will the Minister ensure that the issue of cheating in the Brexit referendum is pursued?

**Chloe Smith:** As you will know, Mr Speaker, given your role in connection with it, the Electoral Commission is an independent body. I am not able to respond at this point to questions about investigations that it is undertaking.

### Government Procurement: Small Businesses

3. **James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to encourage the use of small businesses in Government procurement. [906087]

10. **Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to encourage the use of small businesses in Government procurement. [906094]

11. **Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to encourage the use of small businesses in Government procurement. [906095]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden):** Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and we are determined to continue to level the playing field so that they can compete for Government contracts. That is why in April I announced a number of measures to help achieve that and have recently met the Government's strategic suppliers and Ministers in several Departments to ensure that those measures are delivered.

**James Duddridge:** I thank the Minister for that reply. Specifically, how will coastal towns such as Southend-on-Sea benefit from the changes in this procurement procedure?

**Oliver Dowden:** As my hon. Friend will know, small businesses generate more than 16 million jobs and we are determined to level the playing field so that those in coastal towns such as Southend get their fair share of prosperity and win Government contracts. I encourage businesses in Southend to look on Contracts Finder, on which more than 17,000 small businesses are already registered, for procurement opportunities.

**Chris Davies:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that we have a vibrant and mixed group of suppliers and small businesses from all corners of the UK, including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and that they should all be considered equally in the procurement process?

**Oliver Dowden:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. It is crucial to ensure that we have a diverse supplier base. We have made a number of changes to the Government procurement processes to assist small businesses, including requiring prime contractors to advertise subcontracting opportunities on the Government Contracts Finder. We also divide contracts into separate lots, including by region, when that makes commercial sense.

**Bim Afolami:** I thank the Minister for his responses. As seen from my recent work on the Public Accounts Committee, there sometimes appears to be a conflict between large strategic suppliers who see themselves as aggregators of several procurement contracts for small business and other instances in which small businesses would like to get certain contracts directly from Government. Will he explain the Government's thinking on how to balance those two approaches?

**Oliver Dowden:** We already require buying authorities to disaggregate contracts so that small and medium-sized enterprises can compete. However, there will, of course, be contracts in which disaggregation would affect value for money. That is why we recently announced that when large contractors are successful, they will be required to advertise those subcontracting opportunities on Contracts Finder, so that small businesses can bid.

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): What assessment has the Minister made of the cost implications where outsourced contracts have been overturned by the High Court because of incompetent procurement processes? I refer specifically to the expensive mess created by Conservative-controlled Lancashire County Council in connection with a Virgin contract for children's services.

**Oliver Dowden:** As the hon. Lady will know, the Cabinet Office has extensive processes to ensure successful procuring. If she is questioning the overall purpose of procuring, I refer her to the comments made earlier by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office. In addition, research shows that public authorities save at least 11% by contracting out services. That means more money for health and education.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): The Minister referred to small businesses as the backbone of our economy. What plans does he have over this Parliament to strengthen that backbone and increase targets in terms of accessibility of procurement for small businesses?

**Oliver Dowden:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. In the previous Parliament, we set and met a target of 25% of all Government procurement going to small businesses. We set a challenging target in this Parliament of a third of all procurement going to small businesses. I am taking a number of steps to help us to try to achieve that.

6. [906090] **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Thirty thousand Carillion suppliers are owed £2 billion in unpaid invoices. When will Ministers enforce the prompt payment rules for Government contracts and stand up for small businesses, or is the reality that under this Prime Minister the Conservatives really are the anti-business party?

**Oliver Dowden:** We are absolutely committed to prompt payment. That is why the Government pay over 96% of their suppliers within 30 days. In respect of application to contracting, I have just announced a consultation to ensure we can exclude contractors if they fail to pay small businesses on time.

#### House of Lords

4. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): When the Government plan to respond to the report of the Lord Speaker's Committee on the size of the House of Lords. [906088]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):** The Prime Minister responded to the Lord Speaker's Committee on 20 February. In her response, she committed to do her bit to address the size of the House of Lords by continuing the restrained approach she has so far shown to appointments.

**Martyn Day:** Thanks to the Minister's actions during the debate here on the EU (Withdrawal) Bill, the couple of minutes that Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town had on devolution was more time than all the devolved MPs got collectively. Does the Minister think it acceptable that unelected Members of the House of Lords had

more opportunity to debate the Government's redrawing of the devolution settlement than any elected Member from Scotland?

**Chloe Smith:** As you will know, Mr Speaker, because you spent many hours in the Chair, we spent several hundred hours debating the Bill. I am proud that it has attained Royal Assent. I think we can all agree that that will provide greater certainty to businesses and citizens as we exit the EU. It is a shame that the Scottish National party seems not to be interested in that.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Ind): Does the Minister agree that the House of Lords would be vastly improved if it was smaller and democratic?

**Chloe Smith:** I echo what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said about the role we see for the House of Lords: it should continue as a scrutinising Chamber but respect the primacy of the Commons, which certainly is the democratically elected Chamber.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Does the Minister really think that next week's by-election, with 31 electors who are the children and grandchildren of people who got there illegitimately, is, in a modern democracy, the right way to elect Members of Parliament in another place?

**Chloe Smith:** The right hon. Gentleman is an experienced Labour Member of Parliament, so he might recall that Labour had a hand in the legislation that guides this process. He will also recall that the Conservative party won the general election on a manifesto that said it would not prioritise reform of the House of Lords.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Never mind the House of Lords. When are we going to see this House reduced to 600?

**Mr Speaker:** It is all very well the hon. Gentleman breezily declaring, "Never mind about the House of Lords." The question, inconveniently for him, is focused on the House of Lords. Generosity gets the better of me, however, and I am itching to hear the ministerial reply.

**Chloe Smith:** Mr Speaker, I think the simplest answer is that the Boundary Commission will return with its proposals shortly and the House will have the pleasure of looking at them.

#### Senior Public Appointments: Widening Access

5. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What steps he is taking to widen access to senior public appointments. [906089]

13. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What steps he is taking to widen access to senior public appointments. [906098]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden):** We want to ensure that public boards represent the people they serve. That is why in December we launched our diversity action plan, which committed to 50% women and 14% ethnic minority representation by 2020. Just last month, I appointed Lord Christopher

Holmes to undertake a review of removing barriers that disabled people might face when applying for public appointments.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** What proportion of appointments made to public bodies are people from working-class backgrounds and what proportion went to private school?

**Oliver Dowden:** The hon. Lady raises a very important point about our making sure that public appointments reflect the country as a whole. That is why we have taken a number of measures to increase diversity based on the Bridge report recommendations.

**Chris Elmore:** I am sure that the Minister agrees that we have a huge amount of talent for public appointments, including in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, so will he set out what he is doing to ensure that regional voices are heard around senior public appointments?

**Oliver Dowden:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Diversity means not just ethnic diversity or gender diversity, but regional diversity. That is why, for example, we recently held an event in Glasgow to encourage people in Scotland to apply for public appointments.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): One way in which we could widen public appointments is to limit the amount of them to just two per person, instead of the gravy train that seems to appear as far as public appointments are concerned.

**Oliver Dowden:** As ever, my right hon. Friend is absolutely correct, and I take on board his recommendation. Diversity also means ensuring that we do not have the same old faces constantly applying for and succeeding in winning public appointments. That is why, as part of our diversity measures, we are encouraging a wider array of people to apply for public appointments.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): Does my hon. Friend think that online abuse acts as a deterrent to people putting themselves forward not just for elected office, but for public appointments? Does he also agree that such abuse should be dealt with robustly and that we all have a responsibility to call it out?

**Oliver Dowden:** Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right, and we will be launching a consultation shortly to deal with exactly that point.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Edward Timpson was appointed chair of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and of the new Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel. Andrew Tyrie has been appointed chair of the Competition and Markets Authority. Baroness Stowell was appointed chair of the Charity Commission. They are all probably worthy appointments individually, but a clear pattern is emerging, so will the Minister confirm that the main criteria now for senior public appointments is that someone has to be a former Tory MP or Cabinet Minister?

**Oliver Dowden:** As ever, the hon. Gentleman makes a rhetorical flourish. Sadly, the facts just do not bear it out. The Government's code for public appointments is

clear that political activity is neither a judgment of merit nor a bar to becoming a political appointee. If he looks at the statistics, he will see that of 1,000 candidates in the past year—2016-17—4.9% were Conservative and 4.8% were Labour.

### National Democracy Week

8. **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What plans he has to mark National Democracy Week. [906092]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):** National Democracy Week begins on Monday and events will take place across the United Kingdom, encouraging everyone to get involved in our democracy. I thank those partners who are helping particularly to make sure that we reach under-registered groups. I hope that Members across the House will support it.

**Luke Graham:** National Democracy Week is about encouraging people to be active British citizens. What steps have been taken to extend the National Citizen Service to Scotland, so that my constituents can have the same opportunities as others throughout the United Kingdom?

**Chloe Smith:** I welcome my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for National Democracy Week and for the National Citizen Service. Funding is available for the devolved Administrations to deliver the NCS, although the decision is a matter for them. As a proud Unionist like him, I would like to see young people across the United Kingdom benefiting from it.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I am just wondering how the Government can, with a straight face, celebrate something called National Democracy Week when they are completely undermining democracy in this country by passing laws without the consent of the Scottish Parliament, ripping up the Sewel convention and fundamentally undermining devolution.

**Chloe Smith:** There was not a question in that, but none the less, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. This Government believe fundamentally in the treatment that our House of Commons has given to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which will now serve our country, in leaving the European Union, with certainty for businesses and citizens.

**Mr Speaker:** I think a fair interpretation is that it was a rhetorical question, which is not entirely without precedent in the history of the House of Commons.

### Voter ID Pilots

9. **Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): What representations he has received on the legality of the voter ID pilots. [906093]

12. **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): What representations he has received on the legality of the voter ID pilots. [906097]

14. **Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): What representations he has received on the legality of the voter ID pilots. [906099]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):** My Department has not received any representations about the legality of the pilots. The powers to make the pilot scheme orders are in section 10 of the Representation of the People Act 2000, which was, of course, passed by Parliament. Those powers enable changes to be made to rules regarding the conduct of any local elections in England and Wales.

**Mr Sweeney:** At the last general election, my constituency had the lowest turnout in the UK, and it also has a low registration rate. What kind of democracy are we living in when the Government actively pursue a scheme that results in people being denied the vote, as was shown by the pilot in May, instead of seeking better engagement and participation in our democracy by potential voters?

**Chloe Smith:** The hon. Gentleman will have just heard me setting out measures to encourage more people to be involved in our democracy. He knows, as I hope does every Opposition Member, that there is a point of principle at stake here. Do we defend our system from fraud or do we not?

**Laura Smith:** Two barristers have concluded that there is no provision in the Representation of the People Act to introduce schemes by secondary legislation that restrict or discourage voting, and that the scheme is therefore beyond the scope of the law. Can the Minister reassure the House that she acted within the law?

**Chloe Smith:** Yes, I can. I can also reassure those listening that this is clearly a series of Labour Whips' handout questions.

**Laura Smith** *indicated dissent.*

**Chloe Smith:** The Labour party might like to reflect on the fact that it was its 2000 Act that allowed the pilots to be run.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) is signalling that that was very much her own question. It has to be said that Whips' handouts are also not unprecedented in the House, but she is keen to draw attention to her own independent mindedness on this important matter.

**Danielle Rowley:** I recently spoke at an event at Newbattle Abbey College in my constituency about encouraging people to vote—no Whips were in attendance. Meanwhile, the Government's voter ID pilots saw at least 340 people turned away, and many more would have been discouraged from voting. Is this not a slap in the face of people who are working hard to encourage people to vote?

**Chloe Smith:** To be clear, that was 340 out of a total of more than 230,000. I also want to be clear on the matter of principle. The Labour party accepts this principle for its own selection meetings, where it routinely asks for ID from members. Is this good enough for Labour but not for the rest of the country?

## Topical Questions

T1. [906100] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington):** The private sector has a vital role to play in delivering public services and is something that this Government will continue to champion. Earlier this week, I announced new measures in the wake of the collapse of Carillion to promote and deepen responsible capitalism, whereby everyone plays by the same rules and businesses recognise their duties and obligations to wider society. That is in line with the Government's commitment to deliver an economy that works for everyone.

**Mr Hepburn:** As Carillion showed, the outsourcing of Government contracts is nothing but a gamble with jobs and public money. When will the Tories put the public interest first instead of their friends, spivs and speculators?

**Mr Lidington:** The collapse of Carillion has shown that outsourcing genuinely transfers risk from taxpayers to shareholders, directors and lenders—to the private sector company.

T2. [906101] **Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): What work has the Cabinet Office done to ensure that Departments have the skills and people required to deliver a successful exit from the European Union?

**The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis):** My hon. Friend is right to ask that question. We are focused on ensuring that we deliver a successful and positive exit from the European Union. The Cabinet Office works closely with colleagues in the Department for Exiting the European Union and other Departments to ensure that all those places are professionally filled. I can confirm that, as of the end of March 2018, some 5,500 staff have been recruited to the Departments most affected.

T6. [906105] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Further to the question about outsourcing, can the Minister—

**Mr Speaker:** We empathise with the hon. Gentleman. It is okay; maybe some lozenge will be provided, or some water. Please, let us hear the question.

**Mr Cunningham:** Can the Minister give us some examples?

**Mr Speaker:** Was that heard? I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I think we may have to ask someone else to ask his question for him.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): Can the Minister give us some examples?

**Mr Speaker:** We are grateful to the hon. Lady, and we wish the hon. Gentleman well.

**Mr Lidington:** I take it that the hon. Gentleman, through the hon. Lady, was asking for examples of successful outsourcing. I refer him to the outsourcing of the teachers' pension scheme, which has cut administrative costs by nearly half, to the benefit of pension scheme members.

T3. [906102] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What progress has my hon. Friend made in allowing the Jain community to declare their religion in the new census, and will she agree to meet a delegation from the community?

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):** Yes, and I look forward to that meeting. Since the response to consultation on the matter in May 2016, the Office for National Statistics has continued to consult stakeholders, and has met the members of the all-party group on Jainism. It is considering all the evidence provided, and will finalise its recommendations shortly.

T7. [906106] **Faisal Rashid** (Warrington South) (Lab): Will the Minister please explain how the Government justify wasting time and taxpayers' money on the "testing and scrutiny" of contractual arrangements, only to ignore their own highest possible risk rating for Capita and award it the fire and rescue contract?

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden):** As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Cabinet Office has extensive functions to ensure that we award contracts only to companies that offer the very best value, and that was exactly the case in that instance.

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

**Mr Speaker:** Ah, yes, a south-east London knight. Sir David Evennett.

T4. [906103] **Sir David Evennett:** What progress is the Department making in implementing the findings of the race disparity audit?

**Mr Lidington:** The Government have committed themselves to explaining or changing ethnic disparities highlighted by the audit. We have already announced action on criminal justice, employment support, school exclusions and youth unemployment, and we continue to talk to a range of stakeholders to take that work further.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): You will recall, Mr Speaker, that representatives of Wick High School were here last week—thank you for your kind remarks about them. Does the Minister agree that bringing schools the length and breadth of Britain, including my faraway constituency, to the House will do much for learning about democracy here in the mother of Parliaments?

**Chloe Smith:** Yes. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's constituents to this place. I hope that they will find things of interest to them during National Democracy Week, and that the resource packs that are available to all parliamentarians will enable them to make the most of it.

T5. [906104] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What recent discussions has my hon. Friend had with Cabinet colleagues about the cost to the taxpayer of public sector workers' taking trade union facility time?

**Oliver Dowden:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. For too long, unions in the public sector have received taxpayer funding for an activity that is inadequately controlled and poor value for money, which is why we are introducing transparency in respect of facility time. We believe that proper management could save our taxpayers up to £100 million.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The anniversary of the Prime Minister's announcement of a public inquiry into contaminated blood is fast approaching. Can we expect a statement in the House to say that the terms of reference have finally been agreed and the public inquiry can get on with its work?

**Mr Lidington:** I am acutely aware of that anniversary date, and the justifiable expectations of survivors of that tragedy. I have sent the draft terms of reference proposed by the chair of the inquiry to the devolved Administrations, as I am obliged to do. I hope that I can announce the full details as rapidly as possible.

T8. [906107] **Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): What reassurance can my hon. Friend give that Departments will work together to deliver our ambitious plans to create more jobs and prosperity in Weymouth and on the Isle of Portland in the years ahead?

**Oliver Dowden:** Departments across the Government are committed to working with local partners in Weymouth and Portland to build jobs and prosperity. In July, representatives of a range of Departments will visit local partners to see for themselves the enormous opportunities that exist in the area, and to identify how Government policies and programmes could help to support their ambitions.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [906070] **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 27 June.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** This week is Armed Forces Week, and I know that Members from across the House will attend events on Saturday to celebrate Armed Forces Day. This will provide an opportunity to recognise the source of pride and inspiration that our serving men and women are to us. Today is also Reserves Day, and I pay tribute to reservists, including hon. Members, for the integral and vital role that they play in maintaining this country's security here and overseas, balancing their civilian lives alongside their military careers.

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

**Helen Goodman:** The Prime Minister is right: we all celebrate the huge contribution our armed forces and reserves make.

Last year the Prime Minister promised that no school would see a cut in its budget, yet half the schools in Bishop Auckland continue to face real cuts, some of more than £1,000 per child. Does she not understand the damage this does to children's life chances?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Lady knows, we are putting extra funding into schools. We are making extra money available for schools, and the fairer national funding formula that we have introduced is ensuring that some of the schools that have previously been among the worst funded in this country are seeing increases in their funding to help to redress the balance.

Q3. [906072] **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): As a former Chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, may I ask the Prime Minister whether, given the unresolved issues that remain in Northern Ireland, she has any plans to visit the Province in the near future?

**The Prime Minister:** We are considering a number of issues in relation to Northern Ireland at the moment, in the context of both Brexit and the devolved Administration. We hope that the Administration and the Assembly will get back up and running. I can say to my hon. Friend that I hope to visit Northern Ireland in the next few weeks.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to Armed Forces Day and Reserves Day. I hope that we also recognise that we need to do far more to address veterans' housing and health needs.

I also pay tribute to the firefighters tackling the blaze on Saddleworth moor. I am sure all our thoughts are with them, and their communities and families, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) is there today to support them.

On Brexit, the Business Secretary believes that business "is entitled to be listened to with respect."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 609.]

I am sorry to see that the Foreign Secretary is not with us today. He takes a very different view, using an Anglo-Saxon term to make his point. Which is the Prime Minister's view?

**The Prime Minister:** This party and this Government have always backed business and we will continue to back business. And we back business because it is businesses that create millions of jobs for people in our country and provide billions of pounds in tax that we can spend on our public services; and because it is businesses that are the backbone of our prosperity. I say to the right hon. Gentleman that if he wants to start talking in favourable terms about business, he has a decision to make. He can either back business or he can want to overthrow capitalism; he cannot do both.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I take the Prime Minister's response as a thumbs-down to the Foreign Secretary.

In recent days, an unprecedented number of concerns have been raised by trade unions, business and even some Cabinet Ministers. Today the CBI director general said:

"Facts ignored today mean jobs lost tomorrow."

Airbus supports 110,000 jobs in the UK supply chain, many of which are very highly skilled, well paid and unionised. The company says that no deal

"would force Airbus to reconsider its footprint in the country, its investments"

and its

"dependency on the UK."

Can the Prime Minister reassure thousands of workers today, and take the phoney threat of no deal off the negotiating table?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman has raised the question of Airbus. If he is so concerned about our aerospace and aviation industry, why did he not back the expansion of Heathrow in this Chamber? [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. [*Interruption.*] Order. Mr Snell, calm yourself. Acquire the quality of an aspiring statesperson. Calm! The question has been asked, and the answer from the Prime Minister must, and will, be heard.

**The Prime Minister:** I do not normally agree with the secretary general of Unite, but on this occasion I actually do agree with him, because he says that backing the expansion—the third runway—at Heathrow would ensure that our country

"remains a world leader in aviation and aerospace".

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Well, the Foreign Secretary did not back it either, but in his own way, he was helping the aviation industry: by spending 14 hours in a plane for a 10-minute meeting in Afghanistan.

The Government are not threatening the EU with their ridiculous position; they are threatening skilled jobs in this country. But at least one Government Minister understands this: the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb). He has asked this question, which I think is about the Health and Foreign Secretaries:

"Do the leadership aspirations of multi-millionaires trump the need to listen to the employers and employees of this country?"

Well, apparently they do. The head of BMW, which directly employs more than 8,000 workers—that is 8,000 jobs—in this country, has said that he needs to know the Government's plans for customs. He says:

"If we don't get clarity in the next couple of months we have to start making those contingency plans"—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Prime Minister was heard. No concerted attempt from either side of this House to shout a Member down will ever succeed. However long it takes, the Prime Minister will be heard and the Leader of the Opposition will be heard. Get the message.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The noise of people hiding behind the Gallery is interesting, Mr Speaker. I am asking the Prime Minister how many more firms are telling her in private what Airbus and BMW are now saying very publicly.

**The Prime Minister:** We have been meeting with business and we are listening to business. That is why we are very clear on our customs arrangement that we want to ensure not just that we deliver on our commitment in Northern Ireland, with trade as frictionless as possible, but that we can trade around the rest of the world. If we are talking about Government plans for business, it is this Government who have brought the deficit down and it is this Government who are seeing employment at record levels. What would Labour's three-point plan for business be? A 7% rise in corporation tax, nationalisation without compensation and a run on the pound. That is not backing business; it is a plan to break Britain.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** It is very interesting that even those Brexiteers who have made Brexit their life's work are concerned about their own financial interests. The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), for example, is relocating his hedge fund to the eurozone, and the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) is advising his clients to disinvest in Britain. Meanwhile, in the real world, Andrew, who works for Honda in Swindon, wrote to me—*[Laughter.]* I would not laugh if I were you. These are real people with real jobs and real concerns.

Andrew writes:

"I have seen nothing that gives me confidence that the government is going to deliver a trade agreement allowing the seamless flow of goods through Europe's borders. My job along with many others in manufacturing, suppliers and the supply chain hang on this".

So will the Prime Minister ignore her Foreign Secretary, listen to workers, and secure an agreement that safeguards jobs in this country?

**The Prime Minister:** We are putting jobs at the heart of what we do in relation to Brexit. We are putting jobs at the heart of what we do as a Government through our modern industrial strategy and we are ensuring that, when we deliver Brexit, we deliver a Brexit that is good for our economy, good for jobs and good for people up and down this country.

Through most of his career, the right hon. Gentleman has been rather a Brexiteer himself. Why is it then that at every stage he and the Labour party are trying to frustrate Brexit in this House?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The Labour party's priority is defending jobs in this country. I doubt that Andrew from Swindon is alone among skilled workers when he goes on to say:

"I will hold the Prime Minister and her party culpable if my job and those of my colleagues at Honda end up being under threat."

The Cabinet was split in two apparently on options for future customs arrangements with the EU. The Prime Minister's preferred option was a customs partnership. We have had no official feedback on that working party, so did the Leader of the House speak for the Government when she said on Monday:

"I think the customs partnership looks quite bureaucratic and unwieldy"?

Is that option now ruled out as well?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have made clear on a number of occasions in the House, we are looking at both options in relation to customs because we want to ensure that we deliver as frictionless trade as possible

with the European Union and the ability for us to negotiate trade deals around the rest of the world. That is what we should be looking for. It is what we are doing as a Government. The right hon. Gentleman says that the Labour party's interest is in delivering jobs. Why is it then that every Labour Government leave office with more people out of work than when they went in?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Coming from a Prime Minister who presides over an economy in which 1 million people are on zero-hours contracts, that is very rich. She rules out a customs union, the Leader of the House rules out the Prime Minister's preferred option and reality rules out a maximum facilitation model. That leaves only no deal, which she refuses to rule out. She is putting jobs at risk. Sadly, it is not those of the warring egos in her Cabinet—they have now been rewarded with an invite to a pyjama party at Chequers. Meanwhile, thousands of skilled manufacturing jobs and the future of whole industries in Britain are at stake. The Prime Minister continues to promote the fallacy that no deal is better than a bad deal. No deal is a bad deal. Is not the truth that real jobs—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman. I will say it again: there is unlimited time—*[Interruption.]* Order. There is unlimited time as far as I am concerned. *[Interruption.]* Order. The questions will be heard and the answers will be heard, and nothing and no one will stop that happening. It is as simple and unmistakable and clear as that.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

No deal is a bad deal, but is not the truth that the real risk to jobs in our country is a Prime Minister who is having to negotiate round the clock with her own Cabinet to stop it falling apart rather than negotiating to defend the jobs of workers in this country?

**The Prime Minister:** I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what I and this Government are delivering. We are delivering a successor to Trident; stamp duty slashed for first-time buyers; a modern industrial strategy for jobs and growth; action on childhood obesity; 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools; fairer schools funding; new technical education; improved mental health services; expansion of Heathrow; record levels of employment—record levels of employment; falling borrowing; and rising real wages. We have triggered article 50, we have agreed an implementation period and we have passed the EU (Withdrawal) Bill: a Britain fit for the future and leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019.

Q5. [906074] **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): Last weekend I attended celebrations marking 70 years of production of the great British Land Rover. Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the workers of Solihull, commit to securing post-Brexit global trade deals and recognise that new clean diesel engines have a role to play for years to come?

**The Prime Minister:** First of all, I congratulate all the workers at British Land Rover on 70 years of production. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Leaving the European Union gives us an opportunity to be in a position to conduct our own trade policy and to sign our own trade agreements with countries around the world.

My hon. Friend raises a specific point about cleaner diesel engines, which can play an important part in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from road transport and could reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions further while meeting ever more stringent air quality standards during the transition to zero-emissions vehicles. This country is leading on the issue of zero-emissions vehicles, and Land Rover is playing its part.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I commend the armed forces and our reservists for the fine job they do for our country.

Airbus, Honda, BMW, the CBI, the TUC and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders—this Government have completely failed to listen to business, have insulted the business community and have left companies in the dark. Can the Prime Minister tell the House why 186,000 car manufacturing jobs are disposable to her?

**The Prime Minister:** We have been consistently listening to business throughout the negotiations so far. Business said it wants us to give priority to EU citizens' rights here in the UK, and we did just that. Business said it wants an implementation period so there is not a cliff edge next March, and we have negotiated an implementation period so there will be a smooth and orderly Brexit. Business said it wants as frictionless trade as possible, so we are putting forward proposals to ensure we provide that frictionless trade with the European Union.

Alongside that, we will be developing a global Britain, looking out around the world and signing trade deals around the world. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks trade and business is so important, why did he not support Heathrow expansion?

**Ian Blackford:** Not for the first time, the Prime Minister has failed to answer the question, and the cost is that investment in Britain is being turned off by a Government who refuse to listen. More than a year ago, the Scottish Government presented a plan for the United Kingdom to remain in the single market and the customs union to give certainty to business. Just this week, Scotland's First Minister took a trade delegation from Scotland to Berlin.

Every step of the way, the Scottish Government have been seeking to protect jobs and our economic interests. Two years on from the EU referendum, and with the clock ticking down, the Prime Minister has done nothing but increase uncertainty. Has she completed any economic analysis of jobs and the economy were the UK to stay in the single market and the customs union? If not, why not?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman talks about investment into the United Kingdom. Last year, the United Kingdom remained the preferred country for foreign direct investment in Europe. Last year we saw 76,000 jobs being created as a result of foreign investment here in the United Kingdom, more than in the previous year.

If the right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about further confidence from business, he should just look at the fact that this month we have seen £2.3 billion of investment announced by the tech industry as part of

London Tech Week, creating another 1,600 jobs, and I could give him more examples. If he wants to listen to business, he should listen to Scottish business, because its message is very clear: stay in the United Kingdom.

**Q7.** [906076] **James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Fresh from my success in managing to stagger over the line in the recent London marathon, I will be running a 10k road race as part of the Black country fun run in Halesowen this Sunday. The event has raised thousands of pounds for local charities in my constituency. Will the Prime Minister thank the organisers, particularly Alan Bowler and the Halesowen and Rowley Regis rotary club, for the work that they have put into the event, and will she offer her congratulations to those participating in the race on Sunday?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I congratulate my hon. Friend for completing the London marathon earlier this year and, I know, raising money for a very worthy local cause. I am happy to join him in wishing Alan Bowler, the Halesowen and Rowley Regis rotary club, and all those taking part in Sunday's fun run the very best of luck. They are doing it for good causes and we congratulate them and wish them well.

**Q2.** [906071] **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister will know that we still have every nuclear submarine that the Royal Navy has ever had. There are 13 old nuclear submarines tied up in Devonport, seven in Rosyth, and little room for the ones that will come out of service soon. Further to our letter to her a fortnight ago, will the Prime Minister agree to meet me, the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) and the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), who represents Rosyth, to discuss how we can extend civil nuclear decommissioning to those nuclear submarines, to ensure that we recycle them and create jobs in Plymouth, Scotland and west Cumbria?

**The Prime Minister:** We take the issue of the safe storage and disposal of nuclear submarines very seriously indeed. There is capacity for safely storing all remaining operational Trafalgar-class submarines at Devonport following their decommissioning, and work has started on the dismantling of the first submarine, Swiftsure, with more than 50 tonnes of radioactive waste having been removed by the end of May. I believe that the hon. Gentleman and other Members have written to me about this issue; I will respond to him in further detail in due course and ask the relevant Minister to meet him to discuss the issue further.

**Q8.** [906077] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Last week, I met three students at the Spires College in Torquay who have been working on the Send My Friend to School campaign to make schools safe. Will the Prime Minister say what action the UK will be taking to ensure that the safe schools declaration makes a real difference to children who otherwise might not be able to access education?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. We know that conflict is a key driver of educational exclusion. Our education in emergencies work supports greater community awareness of how to protect children in education, by teaching

students and teachers about peacebuilding and strategies for conflict resolution. We view compliance with international humanitarian law as the primary basis to protect schools and educational facilities. We are also encouraging international partners to endorse the declaration, most recently Germany, which signed up last month. We take this issue very seriously and we are acting on that. We are supporting the United Nations' work and I am pleased to say that we are the largest single financial contributor to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Q4. [906073] **Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): West Wales and the valleys remains one of the poorest areas in western Europe, yet since 2015 we have seen the UK Government renege on manifesto promises to electrify the main line to Swansea and the north Wales line, and, more recently, on the development of the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. Will the Prime Minister commit to ensuring that the mid-Wales growth deal does not suffer a similar fate? Or is it her Government's assessment that Wales is simply not worth the investment?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the mid-Wales growth deal. As he knows, I was happy to sign the Swansea city growth deal, the city deal for the Cardiff region, and one for north Wales as well. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales that we are in discussions about the mid-Wales deal and will involve the hon. Gentleman in that.

Q9. [906078] **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend set out the Government's plans to improve educational provision for children with special educational needs, and will she congratulate Geraint Edwards, headteacher of the Priory School in Hitchin, on his brilliant and inspirational work in that regard?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to congratulate Geraint Edwards on the excellent work that he is doing as headteacher of the Priory School. We are committed to helping those children who have special educational needs to achieve well in their education, find employment and, obviously, lead happy and fulfilled lives, so we are implementing the biggest changes to the special educational needs and disabilities system in a generation, to improve these children's lives, and we are investing £391 million to support the reforms.

Q6. [906075] **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Three weeks have passed since the Muslim Council of Britain wrote to the chair of the Conservative party to raise concerns about Islamophobia in the party and it has yet to receive a reply. He has also failed to respond to my letter of 16 June following reports of what looked like an attempt by Tory headquarters to cover up allegations against one of the Conservative party's vice-chairs, the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley). Does the Prime Minister agree with Baroness Warsi and the Conservative Muslim Forum that the Conservative party is in denial about Islamophobia in its ranks?

**The Prime Minister:** Anti-Muslim discrimination is wrong. There is no place for it in our society. That is why, when I was Home Secretary, I required the police specifically to record anti-Muslim hate crime so that we could understand better what was happening and better tackle the issue. We have introduced a new code of conduct in the party. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), the chairman of the party, has met Tell MAMA. We investigate any allegations of Islamophobia that are made relating to members of the party. Action is taken and, in some cases, members have been suspended or expelled from the party as a result.

Q10. [906079] **Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Recently, my right hon. Friend visited my constituency where she announced the Ayrshire growth deal. Does she agree that the deal has the potential to transform the local economy, and may I ask what steps the Government are taking to drive the matter forward?

**The Prime Minister:** I was very happy to visit my hon. Friend's constituency and to highlight the opportunities that the Ayrshire growth deal gives us. As he says, it is important locally, regionally and nationally because of the economic benefit that it can bring. Negotiations have now commenced between both Governments and the Ayrshire councils on how to implement the deal. I understand that officials met on Monday this week to discuss aerospace and proposals for Prestwick, and the work is ongoing across Ayrshire. Therefore, the work is continuing and I can assure him that we recognise the importance of the Ayrshire growth deal.

Q11. [906081] **Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the Foreign Secretary for expressing so pithily what her hard Brexit will do to British jobs and British businesses?

**The Prime Minister:** I say to the hon. Lady, as I have said many times in this House before, that we are pursuing a Brexit that will be a good deal for the UK, a good deal for business, a good deal for citizens, and a good deal for jobs. I believe that we will achieve that because it will be good not only for the United Kingdom, but for the European Union.

12. [906082] **Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): After the tragedy of the Grenfell fire, may I put it to the Prime Minister that the people left being asked to pay for the costs of removing cladding and replacing it are the private leaseholders in private high-rise blocks? Can she try to make sure that the owners—the freeholders—have put to them the points well known to the all-party group and to the charity, Leasehold Knowledge Partnership, particularly Martin Boyd and Sebastian O'Kelly, that the situation is intolerable and needs to be solved properly?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend will be aware of the action that we have taken as a Government in relation to the social sector and to local authorities, but we are calling on building owners in the private sector to follow the example set by the social sector in taking action to remove unsafe cladding. Some in the sector—I could name Barratt Developments, Legal & General and Taylor Wimpey—are doing the right thing and taking responsibility, but we want others to follow their

lead and we will continue to encourage them to do so. They must do the right thing, and if they do not, we are not ruling anything out at this stage.

Q13. [906083] **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Redford barracks has stood proudly for more than 100 years in Scotland's capital city, yet this Government are threatening its closure with an adverse impact on both service personnel and the local community. My constituents have been waiting for months for an update on the better defence estate plan. It being Armed Forces Week, will the Prime Minister help me get an answer from the Secretary of State for Defence, and will she tell him that, rather than concentrating on his plans to replace her as Prime Minister, he should halt the destruction of the defence estate in Scotland?

**The Prime Minister:** A number of decisions are being made to ensure that we have the defence estate that is right for our future capabilities and requirements. I will ensure that the hon. and learned Lady's point about not yet receiving a reply from the Secretary of State is brought to the attention of the Ministry of Defence.

**Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): We all need to keep our election pledges, whether we made those pledges one year ago or nine years ago, so will the Prime Minister update us on our Conservative manifesto election pledges to leave the single market, leave the customs union and pursue an independent trade policy?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my right hon. Friend for the service that he has given to the Government over the past seven years, most recently in an important role on the very topic that he has just raised—as Minister of State at the Department for International Trade—and also in his time as Minister for London. He conducted all these jobs with great ability and distinction, and I thank him for all the work that he has done.

My right hon. Friend is right that we want to ensure that we can negotiate independent trade deals around the rest of the world. We will be leaving the single market and the customs union so that we can do exactly that—have an independent trade policy and negotiate our own trade deals with the rest of the world.

Q14. [906084] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Almost two weeks after the significant fire at Glasgow School of Art and the O2 ABC, neighbouring constituents and businesses are still out of their properties. Many are struggling to get their insurance companies to provide adequate support as their own properties have not been damaged. Will the Prime Minister do all in her power to push insurance companies to provide the maximum support possible to my constituents and businesses?

**The Prime Minister:** This was a terrible fire, damaging one of Glasgow's iconic landmarks, which was rightly regarded as a building of great architectural significance.

**Alison Thewliss:** What about constituents?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I am coming to the issue that the hon. Lady has raised. I just wanted to take this opportunity to give my heartfelt thanks to the work of the emergency services, which did their best in addressing the fire. The hon. Lady has raised a specific issue about insurance and ensuring that others can return to their

buildings that are close by. I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Scotland is aware of that question, and we will look at what can be done.

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): At 6.49 am my constituent, James Wheatcroft, emailed me to say:

"I am currently standing at Shepreth station. 06.40 has just arrived. 05.38, 06.10 and 07.25 bus cancelled so this is on the ONLY train to London this morning until the 8.10...Five people have been on the platform for over an hour and...miss their Eurostar connection the station car park is totally empty—people giving up and working from home."

At 7.29 am he sent another message:

"Our train has now broken down...Another train has arrived but there is not enough room for everyone."

At 7.59 am, he said that the rest of the passengers had to get a train back north, there was no room for them on that either and that

"people simply decided to go home."

Please, Prime Minister—assurances from Govia Thameslink Railway are not enough. We need a taskforce to micro-manage these contracts back to performance. Will she please commit to that?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend. The performance provided for passengers has been unacceptable. The Department for Transport has been working on this issue with GTR, and it is working to provide a new timetable, which will provide more capacity on the services, but it is not the same timetable that was originally introduced in May. The Department for Transport will continue to work to ensure that the rail company is providing the performance that passengers rightly expect and deserve.

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): On Saturday, around 100,000 people gathered in Parliament Square to demand a people's vote on the final Brexit deal. I did not see the Prime Minister among the many Conservatives in the crowd, and the Leader of the Opposition was in the middle east avoiding the many Labour supporters. Since the Prime Minister—[*Interruption.*] Since the Prime Minister has such confidence that she will produce a good Brexit deal, why is she so afraid of allowing the final say to the public to endorse it?

**The Prime Minister:** The Liberal Democrats have argued in the past that we should have a referendum to give people the choice about whether to stay in the European Union. We gave the people a choice, they have voted and we will deliver on it.

**Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm to the House today that she is absolutely committed to this country retaining its tier 1 military status, and equally open to the idea that increased threats require increased resources, but also committed to reforming the Department so that we end the narrative of constant decline of UK military capability when the truth is in fact the complete reverse?

**The Prime Minister:** We are absolutely committed to this country remaining a leading military power. There is no question but that the Government will do what they need to do to ensure that we are a leading military power, but we need to ensure that we look at the threats

that we are now facing and the capabilities we need as these threats change. That is what the modernising defence programme is about. My hon. Friend makes the important point that this is also about making sure that our Ministry of Defence is operating as cost-effectively as it can so that we ensure that we are providing for the brave men and women in our armed forces, but also addressing the needs of the future. What do we need the Ministry of Defence and our armed forces to look like in 2030? That is the question, but we are committed to remaining a leading military power.

**Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): On Saturday, I was at BMW Cowley with 15,000 people, all of them BMW workers and their families. Just two days later, we had the starkest warning yet from BMW about the damage of a chaotic deal on Brexit for customs processes. When will the Prime Minister's Government ditch the ideology and in-fighting and prioritise reaching a workable deal on customs?

**The Prime Minister:** We are doing exactly that. We are putting forward proposals—[*Interruption.*] We are putting forward proposals to ensure that we can have as frictionless a trade with the European Union as possible. That is the aim of this Government, that is what we are working on, and that is what I am sure we will deliver on.

**Nick Boles** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Across the country, people are taking great pride in the disciplined performance of Gareth Southgate's young and diverse team. Will my right hon. Friend signal her Government's support for their campaign during the play-offs by asking public buildings across England to fly the St George's cross, alongside the Union Jack if they want? Will she also offer especial help to the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) in raising her own St George's cross to support our World cup campaign?

**The Prime Minister:** On the issue of flying flags, as I am sure my hon. Friend will appreciate, we are flying the armed forces flag at No. 10 this week, but I do want to join him in congratulating the England team on making it through to the next round in the World cup. I can assure him that No. 10 will be flying the England flag on the day of each of England's matches from now on, and we will be encouraging other Government Departments to do the same. I can also say that I am going to go further than my predecessors: next year we will do the same for the women's World cup.

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Social care workers up and down the country are being paid less than the minimum wage as a result of incorrect Government guidance. We are repeatedly told that the Government are in talks with the EU to resolve this issue. Why are the talks taking so long? Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and commit to paying the workers what they are owed, directly through an HMRC scheme?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady raises an issue about people being paid the minimum wage. Obviously, there are rules in place to ensure that exactly that happens.

**Laura Smith:** It is not happening.

**The Prime Minister:** We are aware of the issue that the hon. Lady has raised. There have been discussions taking place in relation to that. We have been working to ensure that this matter can be dealt with not just in the interests, obviously, of those who are working in the social care sector but also in having a care for the impact that it will have on the charities that are working in that sector.

**Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): In matters relating to my constituency, education, defence and local government are all in need of more funding. Can the Prime Minister assure me that the very welcome allocation of more money to the NHS does not crowd everything else out?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right to stand up and speak on behalf of his constituents and their interests, as other Members of the House do. As I made clear when I made the announcement about the NHS funding, other Departments' budgets will all be considered in the spending review.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): Everyone knows that Black country brewers brew the best beer in Britain. Holden's in Dudley has been bottling beer continuously for 75 years, even through the war, but along with other producers, it has had to cease production this week because of the European CO<sub>2</sub> shortage. What are the Government doing to sort that out, so that we can all enjoy a beer during the World cup?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that that is predominantly a commercial matter for the companies affected—the producers and suppliers. I am aware of the reports of shortages across Europe, and I know that industry is working on the solution. Although it is an issue for industry, the Government are in regular contact with the UK producer, distribution and consumer companies and trade associations, including those in the food and drink sector. He has made his point well, and I am sure that all those involved are working hard to ensure that his aim can be achieved.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): This morning the Supreme Court ruled that the Government had created inequality in not extending civil partnerships to everyone when they passed the equal marriage legislation back in 2013, and that discrimination needs to be addressed urgently. Will the Prime Minister now support an amendment to my Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc.) Bill when it goes into Committee next month, as the quickest way to resolve this illegal inequality and extend civil partnerships to everyone?

**The Prime Minister:** We are very well aware of our legal obligations, and we will obviously need to consider the judgment of the Supreme Court with great care. We also recognise the sensitive and personal issues that are involved in this case, and we acknowledge the genuine convictions of the couple involved. My hon. Friend refers to his private Member's Bill. As he will know, we have committed to undertake a full review of the operation of civil partnerships. I know that there has been a lot of

discussion with him about his Bill. We are supporting his private Member's Bill, which would enshrine that commitment in law.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Over 100 firefighters are tackling fires across Saddleworth moors, spread over 7 square miles in my constituency and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds). Will the Prime Minister join me in commending members of the Greater Manchester fire and rescue service and Greater Manchester police and the many others who have volunteered and contributed to bringing the fires under control? Will she commit to allocate contingency funds to those authorities affected, in recognition of the huge impact of this major incident on their resources?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that the sympathies of Members across the whole House are with everyone affected by the fire, and I join the hon. Lady in commending the emergency services and all the volunteers and others who have been working to deal with the fire and fight it. I can reassure her that the Home Office is monitoring the situation closely with the National Resilience Assurance Team. So far, no request for Government support has been made by the Greater Manchester fire and rescue service, but we are keeping this under constant review, and operational policy arrangements are in place to provide support if required.

**Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): All Rolls-Royce motorcars—an iconic global brand—are made in my constituency. Every day, 150 trucks arrive from Europe to supply BMW plants, and 120 trucks leave the UK headed for Europe. We are the only serious party of business, so can the Prime Minister give some certainty and confidence to the largest employer in my constituency

and businesses up and down the country that they can continue their seamless operating model as we leave the EU?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that issue. Obviously Rolls-Royce plays a very important role in her constituency, but also in our country. It is an iconic brand for our country. We want to have the greatest possible tariff-free and frictionless trade with the European Union. That is what we are working on. At the same time, we want to ensure that we can negotiate other trade deals around the rest of the world. We want UK companies to have the maximum freedom to be able to continue to trade with and operate within European markets, while letting European businesses do the same here in the UK, but we also want to encourage our excellent, iconic businesses to have better opportunities to trade around the rest of the world.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Finally, I call Dr Paul Williams.

**Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): Two Select Committees—the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee—have today released a joint report describing a vision of a social care system where quality personal care is delivered free at the point of need, separated from the ability to pay, and how to achieve that vision. The Committees' citizens jury said this was a system they were prepared to pay for. Does the Prime Minister share that vision?

**The Prime Minister:** We will obviously look very carefully at reports that have been produced by Select Committees of the House. We are committed to producing a social care Green Paper in the autumn.

## Points of Order

12.50 pm

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I will come to the hon. Gentleman when there is an appropriate air of hush, anticipation and respect for the hon. Gentleman—to which we are gradually approximating. [*Interruption.*] I know the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) used to be a teacher, but she does not have to raise her hand in the Chamber, as though she was asking a question. We will come to the hon. Lady and her point of order in due course. First, I hope the House will be quiet as we hear the point of order from Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for taking my point of order earlier than normal. The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition referred to me in his comments earlier. He has only been a Member of the House for 35 years, so he may not have learned the form—it is considered good form for a Member to tell another Member in advance when they are going to refer to them—but that is not the point. What the right hon. Gentleman said was false in all respects. My company does not actually run any hedge funds, so to have moved a hedge fund out of this country would have shown a remarkable acrobatic nature within the business; we have not in fact done so. I wondered whether he might like to take this opportunity, as he is still in the Chamber, to set the record straight, rather than otherwise be a peddler of false news or perhaps guilty of terminological inexactitude.

**Mr Speaker:** Ah, I know that terminological inexactitude is of unfailing interest to the hon. Gentleman, who appreciates the historical significance of the term that he has just used. It is perfectly open to the Leader of the Opposition to come to the Dispatch Box if he wishes to do so. [*Interruption.*] Order. All this hand waving is rather unseemly. However, the right hon. Gentleman is not under any obligation to do so. The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) has made his point, and it is on the record. I thank him for making it, and we will leave it there.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** If there are other points of order, I will exceptionally take them now, before we proceed to the urgent question.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I rise to ask your advice on a matter of exceptional importance to my constituents. As you know, I have been seeking for quite some time now to get a simple, clear answer to what I believe to be a simple, clear question. I have written to Ministers, put in written questions and asked questions during oral questions, and so far I have been unable to get a straightforward answer to this question: when will this Government release the money for the child and adolescent mental health services unit in my constituency that they have long promised? In fact, to

the last written question I put in, I received what can only be described as the slightly offensive reply that “details of ministerial discussions are not...disclosed.”

They have not even had the decency to give me some kind of timeframe. How can I get the Department of Health and Social Care to tell me when it will release the money for the CAMHS unit that is so desperately needed in my constituency?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order, and for giving me notice that she wished to raise it. I can understand her frustration at the responses she has received from the Treasury. I believe that the practice of Departments in responding to questions about ministerial discussions varies somewhat. I would be most concerned if Departments were not giving equal treatment to questions from Members on both sides of the House. This point will be heard—if not immediately, then in due course—by the Leader of the House, who is the custodian of the rights of all Members, or one of the important custodians of the rights of all Members.

The hon. Lady may wish to raise her concerns with the Chair of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), as his Committee keeps a watchful eye on Departments’ patterns of answering parliamentary questions. Meanwhile—I know this is frustrating and irritating for her—I encourage her to persist in questioning. My almost failsafe advice to a Member seeking guidance about how to proceed in relation to some unresolved matter is: persist, persist, persist! There are many examples of Members on both sides of the House who have specialised in such an approach. I feel sure that the hon. Lady will not mind my praying in aid the late and, to many, great Sir Gerald Kaufman, who was not to be dissuaded from the pursuit of what he thought was proper by non-answers, delay or procrastination. That right hon. Gentleman simply went on and on and on until he secured the satisfaction that he sought, and I commend such an approach to the hon. Lady.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I will come to the hon. Lady, but first I call Mr Richard Drax.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Before the Leader of the Opposition leaves the House, may I raise the point already raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)? You, Mr Speaker, are very much against our using the word “lie” in the House, and I understand why, but what about “misleading”, because there is no doubt that the Leader of the Opposition has misled the House and the country? Normally, it is the tradition for a Member to apologise if they mislead the House. I seek your advice on this urgent matter, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** It is an important matter, but I have the benefit of the Clerk, who has instantly consulted his scholarly cranium, having swivelled round and advised me, “No”. The reason why I say no to the hon. Gentleman—I accept that the point is serious—is that to say that the Leader of the Opposition has misled the House and committed an offence is to accuse him of

having deliberately misled the House. There is no suggestion of that, even from the hon. Member for North East Somerset.

Although I completely understand both the support of the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) for his colleague and his genuine concern about this matter—he is himself unfailingly polite at all times—it is not for the Chair to seek to arbitrate in such a matter about whether a parliamentary error has been committed. Each Member of this House, whoever that Member is and whatever post he or she occupies, is responsible for words uttered in this Chamber and, as appropriate, for the correction of them; I am not the umpire of whether he or she is required to make a correction. That is not just a doctrine evolved on the spot, but the very long established practice of this House. The hon. Gentleman has made his point and it is on the record, and it may even wing its way to the people of his Dorset constituency.

**Catherine West:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is my first point of order in three years, so I am actually quite excited.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): As are we all.

**Catherine West:** It is about a serious matter, however. At Prime Minister's questions on 14 March, the Prime Minister instructed the Home Secretary to meet me to discuss the epidemic of gun crime in Haringey. A further meeting with a junior Home Office Minister was promised in connection with the totally separate case, involving mistaken identity, of an anti-terror raid in my constituency in April. It has now been 15 weeks since the first promise was made, and neither of these meetings has materialised. Mr Speaker, teenagers are dying in my constituency from knives and guns, and I urgently seek your advice about whether there are any parliamentary mechanisms by which I can ensure that the Government fulfil the promises made to meet me on behalf of those constituents.

**Mr Speaker:** My instant response to the hon. Lady is to mention to her—she will be aware of this fact, but it may not be known to people observing our proceedings—that an important Bill, the Offensive Weapons Bill, is about to be debated on Second Reading. If I may politely say so, that would be a convenient opportunity again to flag up her discontent on the matter. I thank her for giving me notice of this point of order, and I would say, more widely, that I entirely understand her—and, in her position, I would feel—great annoyance that it seems to be taking an inordinately long time to arrange a meeting with Home Office Ministers to discuss these very serious matters, and specifically to honour, as I understand from what she has said, a commitment to her. The concern will have been noted by those on the Treasury Bench, and I hope that a meeting will be swiftly arranged. It would be unfortunate—not just in terms of inconvenience to the hon. Lady, but of embarrassment to the occupants of the Treasury Bench—if it were necessary for her to raise this matter in the Chamber on a subsequent day, so I hope that help will be at hand sooner rather than later.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Perhaps surprisingly, the Prime Minister did not choose to tell the House during Prime Minister's Question Time about the resignation this morning of the leader of the Welsh Conservative party over remarks he made about Brexit and business. This was despite their being indistinguishable from the remarks made by the Foreign Secretary, apart from the swearing. Is there any means by which this matter could be put on the record?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman, who is a very experienced and dextrous Member of this House, has found his own salvation. Furthermore, he has not just stumbled into finding it; he knows that by the utterly bogus device of a contrived point of order he has achieved his objective, as his demonstration of amusement evidently testifies.

## Privately Financed Prisons

1.1 pm

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Justice Secretary to make a statement on the Government's plans for more privately financed prisons.

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart)**: Yesterday, I attended the Justice Committee hearing on prison populations and confirmed that, in line with the 2016 White Paper and the 2017 manifesto, we remain committed to delivering 10,000 new prison places in order to replace the places in prisons that at the moment often have old, unsuitable and expensive accommodation.

During the Committee testimony, I confirmed two things. The first was that we will be proceeding at Wellingborough with a public capital financed prison, with work to begin at the end of this year or the beginning of next, subject to the usual tests of affordability and planning. I also confirmed that at the Glen Parva site we will be continuing with the current demolition and proceeding, again subject to the normal tests of affordability and planning, to a competition for a private finance initiative construction of the Glen Parva prison. We will then continue to push ahead with the four subsequent prisons, bringing us to the total of 10,000 places.

We are also investing £16 million in further investments in repairs in the existing estate. All of this is absolutely essential because, as the shadow Lord Chancellor is very aware, much of our estate remains old, expensive and unsuitable for prisoners, and we must move to regenerate it.

**Richard Burgon**: Yesterday, the prisons Minister announced a new private prison at Glen Parva. Previously, the Government had announced a £1.3 billion plan to build 10,000 new prison places. Despite repeated questioning from Labour, the Government had provided only obfuscation as to how these places would be paid for—now we know why. I hope that my list of questions will finally be answered today.

The Ministry of Justice has been cut more than any other Department—it has been cut by 40%, or £4 billion per year. The flipside of cuts is a greater dependence on privatisation and outsourcing, and when it comes to our prisons it is the public who pay the price. Carillion's collapse affected half the prison estate, where it was contracted to do basic prison maintenance. Yesterday, the prisons Minister revealed that the contract was "completely unsustainable", costing the public millions of pounds more each year, yet now we have more private contracts on the way. There are therefore questions to answer.

How many other new prisons are the Government considering building under PFI? What is the estimated additional cost to the public ministry of building prisons under PFI? Will the new prisons have their maintenance work outsourced? Does the Minister still definitely intend to sell off Victorian prisons that do nothing to reduce reoffending? If not, does that mean less income and more privatisation in our prisons estate? Will he allow any of the companies being investigated by the Serious Fraud Office for overcharging the MOJ—Serco and

G4S—to bid to run the new prisons? Will the new residential women's centre announced by the Government today be financed by the private sector? Finally, will the new Justice Minister, who once worked in a senior role at Serco, which has £3.6 billion worth of MOJ contracts, be involved in the tendering process for any more of these private prisons?

**Rory Stewart**: The shadow Lord Chancellor asked a number of important questions. Let me go through the answer on the six prisons where the 10,000 places are. At the first prison, Wellingborough, the construction will be funded by public capital. The second prison, Glen Parva, will be funded through PFI. We are exploring a range of other funding arrangements, including private finance, for the remaining four prisons but we have yet to achieve a resolution on that.

On the question of who we would like to bid, of course we will be looking for legal, reliable bidders, but I wish to emphasise that the key here is about getting quality and diversity into the estate. We do not want to be overly ideological about this. We believe in a mixed estate. There are some excellent public sector prisons. I had the privilege of visiting Dartmoor prison recently, where prison officers within the public sector estate are delivering excellent services and getting very good inspection reports. At the same time, Serco is running a difficult, challenging prison at Thameside, which has 1,600 places, and is innovating. It is bringing in new technology, it is bringing computers into cells and it has had a real impact on violence and on drugs.

At Liverpool's Altcourse prison, G4S is running a prison where there are fantastic employment facilities and workshops in operation. The inspectors have clarified that in Liverpool the private sector, drawing on the same population size, is outperforming the public sector. This is not a question of a binary choice between the private and the public sectors; it is a question of a diversity of suppliers, who can often learn a great deal from each other.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the question of whether a prison is publicly or privately financed and operated is an ideological irrelevance to the very many problems he faces? While accepting my congratulations on all the announcements he and the Secretary of State have made this morning, will he confirm that he will continue to give priority to reducing the numbers in prison, where possible, by removing those who are merely inadequate, those who are mentally ill and who could benefit from rehabilitation elsewhere? Will he also ensure that he gets rid of the older, slum, overcrowded prisons and that the new prisons can provide the quality of security and rehabilitation that the public deserve?

**Rory Stewart**: That question comes from someone who was of course a very distinguished Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. My right hon. and learned Friend makes a powerful point: we need to ensure that prison is there primarily for the purposes of punishment, the protection of the public and turning around lives in order to prevent reoffending. We have to be absolutely clear that people who ought to be in prison must be in prison and properly housed there, and we must work to turn their lives around. He has put his

finger on the fact that we have inherited a very challenging estate. Almost a quarter of our prisons are buildings that stretch back to the Victorian era or, in some cases, to the late 18th century. That causes unbelievable problems of maintenance, and it contributes to problems of overcrowding and to issues of decency. All of that gets in the way of our ability to provide the conditions that allow us to turn around prisoners' lives. Therefore, it unfortunately gets in the way of preventing reoffending, which, ultimately, is the best way of protecting the public.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): In the same week that the east coast line trains began running under public ownership, following the third failure in 10 years of the privatised model, we now have the Tories moving to privatise yet more of the Prison Service. We know it was the then Justice Secretary—he is now Transport Secretary—who awarded Carillion the £200 million outsourcing contract for prison maintenance. What due diligence did he complete on Carillion before signing off on that? Why was it allowed to underbid for the contract by £15 million? The prisons Minister said that the Carillion deal was “completely unsustainable” and a “real, real lesson” for the MOJ, so why does he think that yet more privatisation is the solution?

Lastly, the MOJ confirmed in a written answer on 21 June that the Government hold contracts worth £3.6 billion with the private firm Serco, despite the firm having been the subject of an investigation by the Serious Fraud Office. Does he honestly think that will reassure the public that we are not heading for a repeat of what happened with Carillion?

**Rory Stewart:** To some extent, we are going over old ground again. The key, I believe, is to focus on the results on the ground. Let us start with the hon. Gentleman's final question. We should really be judging Serco's, Sodexo's and G4S's performance in prisons by what they are currently doing in prisons. Nearly 25 years of experience now lie behind this. We have a highly experienced Department. There are 14 privately run prisons with very clear key performance indicators. The inspection reports on those prisons are strong—some are among the cleanest and best run in the country, with very good scores from the inspectors on decency, purposeful activity and resettlement.

To clarify on the issue of Carillion, yes, the company was losing approximately £15 million a year on that contract, but the taxpayer was not losing that money. Carillion was bearing the cost. The taxpayer was effectively saving £15 million a year on that contract. At the same time, I agree that we need to take a lesson from what happened, look carefully at the financial viability of these companies and look at their performance in prisons.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's statement, as I did everything that he said about the Government's approach to prisons at the Justice Committee yesterday. Does he agree that anyone who takes an interest and has regularly visited prisons will be aware that the successes and failures within the prison estate have nothing to do with ownership? He has cited two examples of excellent private sector provision; as a south-east London MP, I am well aware of Thameside myself. Does he agree that what we really

need to do across the House is make the case that prison reform is in the interests of society and victims, rather than going down ideological side tracks?

**Rory Stewart:** I think that is something we share across the Benches. Both sides of the House share a common desire: to reduce crime and reoffending, and turn around people's lives. It is a terrible waste that nearly 40% of our prison population have been in care, that nearly 50% have been excluded from school, and that the literacy level of nearly 50% is lower than that of an 11-year-old. The rates of reoffending have been stubbornly high for 40 or 50 years.

We need to work together to crack these problems. Decent, clean, well run and well managed prisons are part of the key. Another part is getting cross-party consensus on the difficult and brave political choices required to begin to reduce the prison population and protect the public through a reduction in reoffending.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Yesterday, the Minister confirmed that the Carillion contract for facilities had not been managed well by his Department and had resulted in additional costs to Carillion. What guarantees can he give the House that the contract for the new prison will be managed in an effective way? Will he ensure that the contract is published and subject to freedom of information, so that we can scrutinise his decisions?

**Rory Stewart:** The right hon. Gentleman has enormous experience of the issue, having been the prisons Minister responsible for managing private prisons. He is therefore aware that one reason we can stand up in front of the House and say we are confident we can do this is that we have been doing it for 25 years.

Some 14 private sector prisons are operating, with good reports from the inspectors. We have a lot of experience of how this is done. This is not a new area of Government activity; the right hon. Gentleman himself managed exactly these prisons. The key is balancing proper competition, which brings in diversity and innovation, with the right key performance indicators to make sure that we stay on top of that performance.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): Unsurprisingly, I add my congratulations to the Minister to those of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke); I absolutely endorse his non-ideological approach. In considering what he will put in place in future, will he look carefully at prison maintenance contracts? I think it would be better if the prisons themselves had greater control over such contracts, rather than there being one contract let centrally to maintain very many prisons.

**Rory Stewart:** Getting the balance right on maintenance will be central. We are talking about three different kinds of maintenance: big structural maintenance, the daily replacement of fittings and so on, and the basic cleaning and facilities management. We need new approaches to all three, but in relation to the last, I pay tribute to the governor of Leeds prison, who is showing that prisoners, by focusing on such things, can get qualifications themselves, improve living conditions for prisoners and prison officers, and take those skills back into the wider community to find employment.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): In the spirit of developing a cross-party consensus on prisons, I welcome the Government's apparent conversion yesterday to the Liberal Democrat policy of axing the vast majority of prison sentences of under a year. When will the policy be implemented? Has the prison building plan that the Minister announced yesterday to the Justice Committee factored in such a policy change?

**Rory Stewart:** The argument that I was making yesterday is that the recent evidence from our Department shows very clearly that people sentenced to short prison terms are more likely to reoffend than somebody with a community sentence—in other words, they pose a greater threat to the public at the moment of release. They also pose a destabilising factor in prisons: they are disproportionately connected to drugs and violence.

At the same time, as has been pointed out, we have an obligation to protect the public and be careful about who exactly we are talking about within this category. An enormous amount more discussion needs to take place. I would be very happy to sit down with the right hon. Gentleman to discuss ideas. This is not an easy one to resolve, but the data is driving us in a particular direction.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): When it comes to fixing our prisons, what matters is what works. Does my hon. Friend agree that HMP Altcourse is an example of a private sector prison doing a good job? As we embrace the future, the approach should be about pragmatism, not dogmatism.

**Rory Stewart:** Absolutely. We are very much open to both types of ownership. While praising some of the performance of private sector prisons, I take this opportunity to reiterate that prison officers in public sector prisons are astonishing individuals. On Thursday, I was lucky enough to attend the prison officers' annual awards, where we heard extraordinary stories about their work, courage, resilience and dedication on long shifts in some of the most challenging environments in this country. They need real tribute. Our public sector prisons are wonderful examples of public service.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): The Minister speaks of the prison population who have been in care, and I know he is well aware of the high proportion of women in the prison system who have been abused in other relationships and settings, but Baroness Corston pointed all that out 11 years ago, which led to the Labour Government setting up what were often called "Corston projects", such as Eden House in Bristol East, which has suffered, I am afraid, from cuts under successive Tory Governments since 2010. It is a bit rich to hear this morning an announcement that coming up with residential alternatives to custody is a new idea.

In addition to what the Minister has said this morning, will he please update us on how facilities for women in the criminal justice system but outside prison are going to be brought back up to scratch, as Baroness Corston intended?

**Rory Stewart:** The Secretary of State and Lord Chancellor met Baroness Corston yesterday and they had a constructive conversation in which they welcomed

each other's points. I absolutely accept the hon. Lady's basic point—that it often feels as if there is nothing radically new in criminal justice; I have just been looking at reports from 1962 on HMP Albany in the Isle of Wight and saw a lot of echoes with what, unfortunately, is still going on in many places today. That is because prisons for offenders are very difficult.

The hon. Lady is also absolutely right that nearly 65% of women in custody have experienced some form of domestic abuse. That is why we are very proud, whatever the cross-party discussions, that we are pressing ahead with the female offenders strategy today. The Lord Chancellor is leading on this, along with the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), the Minister responsible for the female estate.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): I thank the Minister for visiting Chelmsford prison with me a fortnight ago and seeing at first hand the challenges of running the prison in what are, let us say, the more antique wings. Does he agree that rather than there being some public/private ideology, we should focus on prisons that are well built and managed, on making sure that our staff are well supported and on ensuring that prisoners do not reoffend and return after they leave?

**Rory Stewart:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who I believe has visited Chelmsford prison no fewer than seven times, and to the staff at Chelmsford. When I visited, they had had a very difficult three nights, up night after night dealing with a difficult incident. Chelmsford prison represents one of our local prisons that is going through a huge transition. There is a lot of focus on training new staff and one of the keys here is balancing the right physical infrastructure in prisons with getting the training and leadership right, in particular for new prison officers.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Last week, a Defence Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and told us that the Government had awarded a contract to Capita, despite the Ministry of Defence saying it was the highest risk possible for failure—10 out of 10. I just wonder whether this Minister might be able to reassure the House that if Capita comes forward with a bid for any of these contracts and scores a risk of 10 out of 10, it will not be awarded a contract.

**Rory Stewart:** The general point the hon. Lady is making is difficult to disagree with. Obviously, we need to look at the viability of particular companies. I cannot comment on Capita, or on what exactly the MOD is doing, but when assessing bids the Ministry of Justice will very much take into account the financial viability of the company bidding.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): To maximise the efficacy of any contract, one needs a devoted and focused contracted business, but one also needs expertise in the management of that contract. Will my hon. Friend assure me that the skill set among his officials monitoring contracts on a daily, in-real-time basis is as sharp, professional and focused as it needs to be?

**Rory Stewart:** That is absolutely right. It has traditionally been a challenge to bring those private sector skills into government and to make sure we have a critical mass of

people who really understand how to stay on top of those contracts, as my hon. Friend says, not just annually but day by day. We are very proud of our director, Ian Porée, who focuses on this procurement, particularly in relation to probation, and has those private sector skills. As I said, we also have 25 years of experience here.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): I appreciate there are major issues around funding prisons and keeping staff and prisoners safe. The Minister wrote to me about drug scanners in Holme House prison in Stockton North, but he did not address the issue of scanners to detect drugs concealed in prisoners' bodies when they leave one prison for another. Will we get one soon, or is there not enough money?

**Rory Stewart:** There are, as the hon. Gentleman points out, two different types of scanner. There is a straightforward x-ray scanner, which will generally pick up on bits of metal and things outside a body. Then there is a millimetre wave scanner, which is able, in certain of our prisons, to detect objects inside the body. These are expensive pieces of kit: in certain cases, they can run into hundreds of thousands of pounds. We are now beginning to roll them out across the estate. I absolutely agree that that is the technological future and we will be piloting them in 10 prisons to see that they do what we both believe they should do.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): Glen Parva prison is in my constituency, and I commend the Minister for his welcome announcement yesterday with regard to investment. He said at the Dispatch Box that he welcomes quality and diversity of supplier. May I invite him to speak with his officials to ensure that, wherever possible, local suppliers are invited to bid not just for the construction, but for the maintenance and ongoing supply, of Glen Parva prison?

**Rory Stewart:** As right hon. and hon. Members are aware, in tendering for public procurement contracts we can look at social aspects, including local supply. I very much look forward to sitting down with my hon. Friend, who is a real champion for local suppliers in his constituency, to see what we can do to make sure, in this and in other contracts where we are putting a prison in a local area, that local businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, have a fair chance to participate in those contracts.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): In public or private procurement, what attempts will be made to stop the overuse of solitary confinement as a punishment? My constituent, a young man in his 20s, has on several days been locked up for 23 hours a day. He could well take his own life.

**Rory Stewart:** We are very aware of the seriousness of solitary confinement. Segregation should be used only in the most exceptional circumstances. It is sometimes unfortunately necessary, but we want to minimise its use. We want to make sure that segregation, above all, is used for rehabilitation and that that opportunity is used to turn someone's life and behaviour around, so they can get back on to the prison wing and into education

and purposeful activity. We will be underscoring, just as the inspector does, the fact that segregation is a last resort.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What my constituents and taxpayers care about is that the prison system delivers value for money, and that when people come out of prison they are equipped to contribute to society and become citizens again, with a second chance at life. Will the Minister say more about how these contracts will help that agenda?

**Rory Stewart:** This is a very good question. All the 10,000 additional spaces we are bringing in are for category C resettlement prisons. That has been one of the real gaps in the system. We tend to have too many people in local reception prisons and not enough in resettlement prisons, preparing people to make sure they have housing, employment and the right kind of support when they leave. That is vital to getting them a job and stability, and will ultimately prevent reoffending. The entire design of the contracts is to ensure that the prisons, in their architecture and purpose, work for resettlement.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): Responsibility for prisons in Northern Ireland, as the Minister well knows, is a devolved matter. He will also be well aware that we have not had a functioning Assembly in Northern Ireland for 18 months, so we have no Justice Minister. Given those circumstances, will he please give reassurance to the Northern Ireland Prison Service—its members are enormously courageous and face risks daily in their jobs—that the prison estate in Northern Ireland will not be neglected in the continued and unfortunate absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and in particular that the UK Government are well aware of those daily risks run by members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service? Two of its members have been murdered in recent years. No one has faced justice yet, but I live in hope.

**Rory Stewart:** I would like to take this opportunity to pay huge tribute to the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Our permanent secretary works very closely with the permanent secretary of the Department of Justice, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is working hard to try to bring the devolved Assembly back. We really do feel this. The Northern Ireland Prison Service has very, very unusual conditions, which in some ways makes its work even more challenging than the very challenging work undertaken in England and Wales. These are very courageous individuals doing a very difficult job day in, day out. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I welcome the Minister's recent statement and his overall progressive approach towards prisons. I welcome, too, the gratitude and appreciation he shows for all who work in the Prison Service. Will he confirm whether, under the previous Labour Government, the use and number of private prisons increased or decreased?

**Rory Stewart:** This is a beautifully framed question that is clearly teasing me up for something I am unable to use. I am afraid I am not entirely sure, Mr Speaker, what the answer to that question is. I apologise—it is such a beautiful question.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I warmly welcome the Minister's statement. Like the Chairman of the Select Committee, I welcome his approach and that of the Secretary of State to our prisons and to offenders more generally, in particular the female offender strategy and the renewed focus on rehabilitation. Will he consider in due course rolling out the female offender strategy more widely to other prisoners, in particular young offenders?

**Rory Stewart:** This is a matter for my colleague who has responsibility for the youth estate and the female estate, but there are certainly elements in the female offender strategy that have absolute application not just to the youth estate, but to the adult estate. The basic principles, particularly of a trauma-informed approach to the individual still in custody, should have an effect on everything we do in prisons across the board.

## Speaker's Statement

1.28 pm

**Mr Speaker:** I wish to inform the House that I have received a letter from the Leader of the House seeking precedence to move a motion to refer to the Committee of Privileges the refusal of Mr Dominic Cummings to attend a meeting of the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in defiance of the Order of the House of 7 June. I am happy to accede to that request, and I will invite the Leader of the House to move such a motion as the first business tomorrow, Thursday 28 June, after any urgent questions or statements.

## BILL PRESENTED

### NORTHERN IRELAND BUDGET (No. 2) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Karen Bradley, supported by the Prime Minister, the Attorney General, Elizabeth Truss and Mr Shailesh Vara, presented a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland of certain sums for the service of the year ending 31 March 2019; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources (including accruing resources) for the year ending 31 March 2019; and to repeal certain spent provisions.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 238) with explanatory notes (Bill 238-EN).*

## Toilets (Provision and Accessibility)

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

1.29 pm

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require certain buildings to have toilets which meet the needs of persons with a range of disability and accessibility requirements; and for connected purposes.

I realise that access to toilets might sound far from a glamorous political campaign. As a somewhat taboo subject—I am an MP who has often not been afraid to raise taboo subjects in the House—it is rarely mentioned in the media or, indeed, in political debate. Most of us take it for granted, and we rarely hear about it when basic human rights for our citizens are listed, so much is taken as a given. When the subject is raised, it is usually with reference to the developing world where, quite rightly, campaigners seek to raise the importance of people's access to basic sanitation and hygiene, yet too many people are denied that here in modern Britain as well.

Let me start by making it clear what my Bill means by fully accessible toilets, more commonly known as Changing Places toilets. Changing Places toilets should not be confused with standard disabled toilets. They are designed to meet the needs of people with complex needs, providing a height-adjustable, adult-sized changing bench; a tracking hoist system or mobile hoist; adequate space in the changing area for the disabled person and up to two carers; a centrally placed toilet with room either side; a screen or curtain for privacy; a wide tear-off paper roll to cover the bench; a large waste bin for disposable pads; and a non-slip floor.

As the regulations stand, Changing Places toilets are recommended in larger buildings, such as large train stations, motorway services and museums, but are not mandatory. As a minimum, my Bill seeks to strengthen regulations by making the provision of Changing Places toilets mandatory in large new builds, complexes with public access, or sites where visitors can reasonably be expected to spend long periods of time. I say this to every Member in the House this afternoon: if you are not aware that we have a Changing Places facility here in the Palace of Westminster, please take a moment or two today to establish where it is, because one day soon, somebody might ask you if a Changing Places facility is available in this place. Of course, it is ever important that here in Parliament we seek to set an example.

Such a proposal is the aim of the Changing Places consortium, which launched its campaign in 2006 on behalf of more than a quarter of a million people here in the UK who cannot use standard accessible toilets. That includes 130,000 older people, 40,000 people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, 30,000 people with cerebral palsy, 13,000 people with an acquired brain injury, 8,500 people with multiple sclerosis, 8,000 people with spina bifida and 500 people with motor neurone disease. I am sure that there are many more.

The number of people with complex disabilities is growing. Medical advances mean that more babies are, thankfully, saved when once they might not have been, but often they will require considerable assistance as children and as adults. We are all living longer, and

older people make up an ever larger proportion of our population, so the need for extra provision will only become greater. It would be a sad reflection on our society's priorities if people's basic freedoms, such as going out with their family or friends, were restricted by the absence of suitable toilet facilities, yet every week, this is a reality for the thousands of people who are denied access to many of our country's most popular attractions.

While drafting the Bill, I heard from too many people who suffer in this way. Kerry from Milton Keynes has a form of muscular dystrophy and her husband is her full-time carer. She told me:

"Taking a simple trip out these days can be a military operation. We have a checklist of things to take, especially if it's more than a few hours out. The biggest problem I face when going anywhere is when it comes to using a disabled toilet. Some are simply too small to fit me, wheelchair plus hubby—it can sometimes feel very claustrophobic. I find myself limiting my time out because you just can't risk the embarrassment of having an accident—which is exactly what I'm doing more times than I care to admit to."

Adam George, who is 11 years old, requires a toilet with a ceiling hoist and an adult-sized changing table. He loves outdoor activities, and his favourite place to go for a day out is the nearby Flambards theme park, but as he got bigger, the family could not manage with the standard disabled toilet. His mother, Rachel, says she made excuses for a year as to why they could not go, telling him it was closed. After consulting the park about installing equipment to meet Adam's needs, the family have made the difficult decision to undertake legal action against Flambards. Rachel quite rightly asks:

"Can you imagine not being able to access a toilet on a family day out? Especially one you have just paid a lot of money for? Do you just go to places expecting your toilet needs to be met? Why shouldn't disabled people expect the same?"

Samantha Buck's son, Alfie, is seven years old and was born with quadriplegic cerebral palsy after being starved of oxygen at birth. They go into town regularly to shop, to have lunch and to meet up for coffee with other mums and their disabled children and teenagers in the same situation. Samantha explained what she has to go through:

"This is what I am forced to do with my seven-year-old son: I have to lay him on a urine soaked floor inside the disabled loo, with the 2nd carer standing outside with the wheelchair. They have to pass the changing accessories through the open door for all passers by to view. This is one of the most awful experiences I have to face every time I come into town."

Samantha set about campaigning for better facilities for Alfie and the thousands of people who face the same struggles as them every day. I am glad to tell the House that her local council has now agreed to put in two Changing Places toilets, but she feels that the responsibility should not just be for parents and carers to lobby councils.

Current data suggests that there are only 1,123 Changing Places toilets in the UK, with the highest concentrations in major cities. Some areas do not have a facility even within an hour's drive, so people are either confined in their home, need to rush back if nature calls, or have to face the indignity of being changed on the dirty floors of public toilets. Needless to say, the result can be social isolation. The availability of even the existing facilities is under threat, as public services such as libraries are being closed. Often, those buildings provided the only

[Paula Sherriff]

Changing Places facilities in an area but, sadly, that is rarely a priority when local authority budgets bear the brunt of unprecedented cuts. In my area of Kirklees, the nearest Changing Places toilet was lost when the local children's playground closed due to Government cuts.

Another issue is that many accessible toilets are provided for children, but not the adults who also need them. A hospital local to my area has its Changing Places toilet situated on the children's ward. Unfortunately, adults with disabilities cannot access it for safeguarding reasons. We need to urgently rethink our attitude to toilets. Simply labelling a facility as "disabled" or "accessible" does not guarantee that it will be suitable. Most do not have a hoist system or a large changing bench. Disabled and accessible toilets have been found with no level access, and with heavy or narrow doors that are not automated, often with unsuitable or unclear handles and locks. Diverse facilities are also needed to reflect the diversity of the people who need them. Some people need bright fluorescent lights or air fresheners to reduce anxiety, whereas those can lead to sensory overload for others.

My Bill addresses one of those issues that sometimes suffers from being a bit taboo, but for the sake of those who suffer in silence, I believe it must be tackled head on. I hope that the whole House will join me in this campaign.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Paula Sherriff, Nic Dakin, Robert Halfon, Layla Moran, Gill Furniss, Tracy Brabin, Rushanara Ali, Mary Creagh, Ruth Smeeth, Chris Elmore, Mr Kevan Jones and Marsha De Cordova present the Bill.

Paula Sherriff accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November, and to be printed ( Bill 239).*

## Offensive Weapons Bill

*Second Reading*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** The House will wish to know that Mr Speaker has certified clauses 6 to 8, 11, 12, 26 and 27 as relating exclusively to England and Wales on matters within devolved legislative competence.

1.40 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

For the past two years, we have seen an unacceptable increase in recorded knife and gun crime. We have also seen a rise in acid attacks. Sadly, there was a vivid example just this week, with the fatal stabbing of Jordan Douherty, a young man of only 15 who had a great future ahead of him, but whose life was tragically cut short. The Bill will strengthen powers available to the police to deal with acid attacks and knife crime. Its measures will make it more difficult for young people to use acid as a weapon and to purchase knives online.

**Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):** Craftsmen such as carpenters rely on mail order for the provision of their specialist tools because that can no longer be maintained locally. Will the Home Secretary ensure that this excellent Bill does not intrude on the provision of lawful trade?

**Sajid Javid:** I am glad that my right hon. Friend, like me, thinks that the Bill is excellent. I can give him that assurance. As I talk a bit more about the Bill, it will become clear that the right types of reasonable defence will absolutely be in place. For example, knife sales to businesses and for other legitimate use will remain unaffected.

There have sadly been 77 homicides in London alone this year, but violent crime affects all parts of our country, not just our big cities. Violent crime destroys lives and devastates communities, and it has to stop.

**Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** The murder of the young man to whom the Home Secretary referred at the beginning of his remarks took place in the Collier Row part of my constituency. My right hon. Friend will know that we are not used to that kind of crime and people in my area are living in fear. Yesterday we had another incident, this time involving a machete-wielding individual near the town centre. Last month, we had the murder of an elderly lady with a hammer. Crime is spreading out to areas such as Essex, and I have to say that we need more than what is in the Bill. Measures need to be much tougher and the punishment has to fit the crime. Most people want the Conservatives to be a party that really gets to grips with this issue, because people in my area and many other parts of the country are really frightened at the moment.

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. I know that soon after the terrible crime in his constituency this weekend, he was on the scene with others. I look forward, if I have the opportunity, to discussing the incident with him in more detail and

listening to his ideas. He is right that more is needed than just this Bill, and I assure him that these measures are part of a much larger sweep of action the Government are taking, which I will talk about in a moment. I also want to listen to colleagues such as him about what more we can do. I would be happy to do that and to discuss how we can prevent such crimes taking place on our streets.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): As a west midlands MP, I was surprised and shocked by the latest figures on gun and knife crime, because we have more gun crime per head of population than London. Will the Home Secretary elucidate how he thinks these new strategies will deal particularly with urban knife and gun crime?

**Sajid Javid:** I hope that my hon. Friend will agree with what I say about the Bill's provisions on the sale of knives and on the possession of knives and acid—I will come on to certain firearms later. Taken together, these measures will help. However, as I said to our hon. Friend the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), other measures in the serious violence strategy will also help to make a big difference.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): A young man in my constituency was tragically murdered in an incident in Liverpool recently, and unfortunately we in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan have also seen a rise in incidents involving knives. I am deeply worried about material glorifying violence that is shared online in closed social media groups and other forums. What is being done to tackle the sharing of such material online?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Gentleman is right to talk about how, in some cases, social media contributes to the rise of such crime. That was the main topic of conversation at the last meeting of the serious violence taskforce, and soon afterwards we unveiled the new social media hub on serious violence, which will work with internet companies to track down that kind of material. In some cases, that material will be taken offline and, in others, an alternative message will be put out. We are very alive to this and are responding with fresh funding, but I want to see what more we can do in that space.

I have seen at first hand the fantastic job that our police do to protect the public and to help to keep this country safe, but they cannot tackle serious and violent crime alone. We must all work together. I am committed to taking strong action to end this blight on our communities. My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), published the comprehensive new serious violence strategy to which I just referred on 9 April. This marks a major shift in our approach to violent crime and is supported by an extra £40 million of new funding. It shows that the increase in violent crime is due to a number of factors, so this debate should not just be about police numbers, as is so often the case when we discuss such issues. I remind the House that this Government have increased police funding in England and Wales by over £460 million this year, and I have been clear that police funding will be a priority for me in the next spending review.

As the strategy makes clear, the rise in violent crime is due to many factors, including changes in the drugs market. A crucial part of the strategy is also about focusing on early intervention and prevention, which is why we are investing £11 million in an early intervention youth fund, running a national campaign to tell young people about the risks of carrying a knife, and taking action against online videos that glorify and encourage violence. To oversee this important work, we have set up a taskforce that includes hon. Members from both sides of the House, the police, the Mayor of London, community groups and other Departments. I hope that this is just the first stage of us all working together across parties and sectors.

The Bill covers three main areas: acid attacks, knife crime and the risks posed by firearms.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's commitment to tackling serious and violent crime, which we know has such devastating consequences for families. I also agree about the importance of prevention, as well as the legislative measures. Given that some of the measures announced in the serious and violent crime strategy were concentrated around London, Birmingham and Nottingham, and that we have had awful stabbings in Leeds, Wolverhampton and Ipswich, what more will he do to make sure that the prevention work is done right across the country?

**Sajid Javid:** I welcome the right hon. Lady's support and the work she does on the Home Affairs Select Committee, which she chairs, to scrutinise this type of work. She is right that some of the announcements on the community fund to help with early intervention have focused on big cities, but this is just the start. We have more funding to allocate and are already talking to community groups well spread throughout the country. As I said right at the start, although there has been much debate about London and other big cities—we just heard about Birmingham—that suffer from these crimes, they are widespread and extend to our smaller towns and, in some cases, villages, so we have to look at all parts of the country.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): As my right hon. Friend will know, there is some concern among Conservative Members about the proposal in the Bill to ban .5 calibre weapons, because it would criminalise otherwise law-abiding users of a weapon which, as far as I know, has never been used in a murder. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to enter into full discussions with his Ministers before the Committee stage?

**Sajid Javid:** I will say a bit more about that in a moment, but my hon. Friend has raised an important issue, and I am glad that he has focused on it. The Bill does make some changes in relation to high-energy rifles and other such weapons. We based those measures on evidence that we received from intelligence sources, police and other security experts. That said, I know that my hon. Friend and other colleagues have expertise, and evidence that they too wish to provide. I can give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that I am ready to listen to him and others, and to set their evidence against the evidence that we have received.

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): I generally welcome the Bill, but I should point out that the measures he is talking about mean banning the weapons. They relate to about 200 bulky, expensive and very loud rifles which, as far as I know, have never been used for a single crime in this country. It is probably the gun least likely ever to be used in a crime. Is the Secretary of State aware that in pursuing this policy without good evidence, he is losing the confidence of the entire sport-shooting community for no good reason?

**Sajid Javid:** According to the information that we have, weapons of this type have, sadly, been used in the troubles in Northern Ireland, and, according to intelligence provided by police and security services, have been possessed by criminals who have clearly intended to use them. That said, I know that my hon. Friend speaks with significant knowledge of this issue, and I would be happy to listen to his views and those of others.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): If we follow my right hon. Friend's logic, we must conclude that literally every single weapon should be banned. Having served in Northern Ireland myself, I know that there is no end to saying that everything should be banned. If we accept that these weapons are not likely to be used if they are properly secured and controlled, we should think carefully about banning them. If we just go on banning weapons, we will not achieve what we want. In Waltham Forest where I live, handguns are available to any criminal who wants to use them, but those are banned as well. The right people cannot use weapons, but the wrong people certainly carry on using them.

**Sajid Javid:** My right hon. Friend makes the point that our response must be proportionate, and we must ensure that banning firearms leads to the right outcome. He has alluded to his own experience in this regard, and I hope he is reassured by my indication that I am happy to talk to colleagues about the issue. He has also mentioned the need for control and proper possession of any type of weapon that could be used in the wrong way. The Bill contains clear measures based on the evidence that has been brought to us thus far, but I am happy to listen to what others have to say.

**Mr John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) referred to the pervasive nature of the culture that is leading to violent crime. Will my right hon. Friend work with other Departments on some of the drivers of that culture? Some people are driven by the internet and social media, but there may be other malevolent sources of information that lead people into the business of crime. This will require a great deal of lateral thinking, and I know my former apprentice is capable of that.

**Sajid Javid:** I thank my right hon. Friend for making that important point. He speaks with experience of the Home Office, and my predecessor as Home Secretary established the Serious Violence Taskforce for precisely this reason. I have already held my own first meeting of the taskforce. Each meeting leads to action, and, as I mentioned earlier, the last one led to action on social mobility and online activity. However, there are also

roles for the Department for Education, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and other Departments. They will need to do their bit, because, as my right hon. Friend says, this will require cross-governmental action.

**Ben Bradley** (Mansfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend has spoken of the drivers of this type of crime, and the changing nature of the drugs market. I wrote to him this week about the "zombie" drugs, such as mamba, which are affecting my town centre. Is the Bill likely to lead to crackdowns on those new drugs?

**Sajid Javid:** The Bill does not focus on drugs, but my hon. Friend has made an important point. It is clear from the evidence that we have seen at the Home Office that changes in the drugs market are a major factor in the rise in serious violence, not just in the UK but in other European countries and the United States. We want to take a closer look at the issue to establish whether more work can be done on it.

The Bill covers three main areas: acid attacks, knife crime, and the risks posed by firearms. We have consulted widely on these measures, and have worked closely with the police and others to ensure that we are giving them the powers that they need. The measures on corrosives will stop young people getting hold of particularly dangerous acids, the measures on online knife sales will stop young people getting hold of knives online, and the measures on the possession of offensive weapons will give the police the powers that they need to act when people are in possession of flick knives, zombie knives, and other particularly dangerous knives that have absolutely no place in our homes and communities. I believe that the Bill strengthens the law where that is most needed, and gives the police the tools that they need to protect the public.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): I support the Bill—I do not want the Home Secretary to think otherwise—but may I make a point about clause 1? When it comes to refusing to sell goods to individuals, it is shop staff who will be on the front line, and it is shop staff who may be attacked or threatened as a result. Would the Home Secretary consider introducing, in Committee, an aggravated offence of attacks on shop staff? They, like everyone else, deserve freedom from fear.

**Sajid Javid:** I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's support for the Bill. As he will understand, we want to restrict sales of these items in order to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands, but he has made an interesting point about those who may feel that they are under some threat, particularly from the kind of people who would try to buy knives of this type in the first place. If he will allow me, I will go away and think a bit more about what he has said.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Sheffield, like other cities, is deeply affected by a rise in knife crime, and I strongly support the Bill's objectives in that regard. However, our city is also famous for knife manufacturing, and a number of local companies have expressed concern to me about the blanket prohibition of sales to residential addresses, which they fear could have unintended consequences. As the Bill progresses, will the Home Secretary consider alternative ways of achieving its objectives—for example, an online knife

dealers' scheme that would be mandatory for all distance selling, with age verification standards set by the International Organisation for Standardisation?

**Sajid Javid:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but, as he will know, before we settled on any of these measures—particularly the one dealing with knives—there was an extensive consultation involving many people, including manufacturers from the great city of Sheffield and other parts of the UK. I hope it is of some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman that, while it is true that deliveries to solely residential addresses will be prohibited, deliveries to businesses operating from residences will not. There are some other defences which I think will help with the issue that he has raised. For example, the prohibition will not apply to table knives, knives to be used for sporting purposes, knives to be used for re-enactment purposes, or hand-made knives. I hope that that indicates to the hon. Gentleman that we have thought carefully about the issue, but if he has any other suggestions, he should write to me and I will consider them.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** The UK already has a reputation for having the strongest and best firearms legislation across Europe. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the intention of this Bill is to make sure dangerous knives and toxic chemicals are equally strongly legislated against, but it is not the intention to take action against law-abiding citizens?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I could not have put it better myself. She will know that there are already some restrictions on knives; for example, there are restrictions on buying the so-called zombie knives, but there is no restriction on possessing them at present. Part of the Bill's intention is to fill in some of those obvious gaps, as members of the public have asked why the Government have not addressed them before.

**Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con):** I think the point my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) was making is that it is the law-abiding holders of .50 calibre guns who are being made criminals yet these are target rifles. Sometimes the law of unintended consequences in Bills catches us out, such as in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, and we should not be making these people criminals when no crime has been committed in Great Britain by using this calibre of rifle.

**Sajid Javid:** I understand my hon. Friend's point and I hope he takes some reassurance from what I said on that topic just a few moments ago.

**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con):** All of us on both sides of the House wish to see action taken to combat the scourge of violent crime, but a great many of my constituents have written to me expressing concerns about the inadvertent impact of the Bill particularly on rural sports, and the Home Secretary has heard those today. Will he meet me and groups of others so we can make sure those concerns are heard and rural communities' views are taken into account?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend will know that my constituency is also very rural and I hear about issues of that type quite often myself. I am more than happy to meet him and other colleagues who have an interest in this issue and any of the measures in the Bill.

**Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):** The Secretary of State has explained that clause 1 bans the sale of corrosive products to under-18s. I support that, but some of us think the age limit should be at 21 rather than 18. Would he be open to an amendment along those lines? What is the reason for setting the limit at 18, rather than a higher age?

**Sajid Javid:** As the right hon. Gentleman will know, this was consulted on during the preparation of the Bill. We settled at 18 and I do not think we are interested in moving from that, but he does deserve an explanation: 18 is used as the legal age between child and adult for a number of things, and it felt to us to be the right age. It is also an age that is consistent with other Acts of Parliament. We think it is the appropriate age to set the limit on some of the measures in the Bill.

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** It was clear from the consultation on high-calibre rifles that their owners were prepared to look at measures to make sure that those rifles were made as safe as possible so they did not fall into the wrong hands, yet the Government now intend to ban them. Will the Secretary of State look at the consultation again and at the assurances people were prepared to give, and make sure those law-abiding citizens are not adversely affected?

**Sajid Javid:** I hope the hon. Gentleman has heard some of the comments made around this issue over the past 20 minutes or so. I do understand the arguments around the issue, and of course he would expect the Home Office to listen to arguments on the other side as well, which as he says have had an input into the Bill. I am more than happy to listen to colleagues on both sides of the House on that issue and any other issues around the Bill.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** The Secretary of State will have received correspondence from the Countryside Alliance and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation. One of the issues my constituents have asked me about is the compensation clause for weapons that might be taken back or retrieved. How will the value of the firearms be calculated, and where will the money for the compensation come from? Will it come from Northern Ireland or the UK centrally? Will people who surrender firearms face questioning or checks that might dissuade them from surrendering their firearms? We must have good communication with those who hold firearms and will be impacted greatly by this.

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Gentleman will know that these measures in the Bill are devolved in the case of Northern Ireland, and some of the issues he raised about compensation and how it is calculated may well be decisions that eventually the Northern Ireland Government, once in place, will reach. In England and in Scotland if it consents, we have set out how compensation can work, and our intention is to make sure it is reasonable and it works, and that is not just in the case of firearms—there is a general compensation clause. It is harder for me to answer that question in respect of Northern Ireland as ultimately that decision will not be made by the Home Office; it will be a decision that the Northern Ireland Government will have to settle on.

**Mr Charles Walker** (Broxbourne) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the way in which he is approaching Second Reading; it demonstrates that Second Readings of Bills are extremely important and should happen with great regularity. May I commend to him the work in Hertfordshire and Broxbourne council to bring together agencies across the county and boroughs to deal with knife crime? There is a role for local politicians and local agencies in addressing this really complicated issue.

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: ultimately, only so much can be done by the centre. The centre can set the laws and provide funding in certain cases, but much of the work being done, as we have seen with the serious violence taskforce, is community and locally led, and I join him in commending the work in Hertfordshire. We are very much aware of that in the Department, and it sets an example for many other parts of the country.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Building on the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), there is an important leadership role for police and crime commissioners working alongside the local constabulary and the other partners that have been mentioned. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or his colleague, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, share with us, if not today, at a later date, what they consider to be best practice in terms of real leadership on the ground and partnership building to help tackle the problems that we all face?

**Sajid Javid:** In the serious violence strategy published in April there were some examples of good practice, but my hon. Friend makes the point that since then, because of the use of some of the funds for example that were in that strategy, we have seen other good examples. We will be very happy to share them with my hon. Friend.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): As a doctor who has treated children with both stab and gunshot wounds, I commend my right hon. Friend on what he is doing to try to reduce the violence on our streets but, equally, as a Conservative I am not keen to ban things that do not need to be banned. In the past, we banned handguns; what effect has that had on gun crimes committed with handguns in this country?

**Sajid Javid:** I share some of the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend: when a Government ban anything that must be led by the evidence. In doing that we must also listen to the experts on the frontline of fighting crime. As my hon. Friend said, she has in a way been on the frontline dealing with the consequences of this crime. She asked about handguns and the impact of the ban; I do not have to hand any particular numbers or statistics, but I will be happy to share them with her. My hon. Friend's central point is appropriate: when any Government act to ban anything we must be very careful and make sure it is proportionate and led by the evidence.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): The Home Secretary has acknowledged that justice and policing are devolved matters, and has he recognised that we do not have a functioning Assembly at present; we have not had one for 18 months. I was therefore delighted that this Bill

extends many provisions to Northern Ireland in the absence of a functioning Assembly. I am particularly pleased to see that there will be restrictions on offensive products being sold to persons aged 18 or under. I am also pleased to see the restrictions on knives. However, I must reflect to the Home Secretary the extremely troubling evidence that was given to us in the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee this morning by the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, who has requested an increase in police personnel and who has taken off the market three unused border police stations that were for sale. The issue, I have to say, is Brexit. Without infrastructure, there will be movement across the border of offensive weapons, including knives and corrosive products. How will the PSNI deal with those movements under this legislation, which I am pleased to welcome?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank the hon. Lady for her support for the measures in the Bill. She has raised particular questions about Northern Ireland. She will know that, because these matters are devolved and the police have operational independence, how they deal with the issues presented by the Bill and other cross-border issues will be a matter for them. She referred to evidence given to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee this morning, which unfortunately I did not listen to. If she wants to provide me with more information on that, and on how she thinks the Bill might fit in with it, I would be happy to look at that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Sajid Javid:** I must go on, as a number of colleagues want to contribute to the debate.

Turning to acid attacks, of course it is wrong that young people can buy substances that can be used to cause severe pain and to radically alter someone's face, body and life. There is no reason why industrial-strength acids should be sold to young people, and the Bill will stop that happening. We will ban the sale of the most dangerous corrosives to under-18s, both online and offline. We want to stop acid being used as a weapon. At the moment, the police are limited in what they can do if they think a gang on the street might be carrying acid. The Bill will provide them with the power to stop and search and to confiscate any acid.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): I welcome what my right hon. Friend is saying about acid. Will he give further thought in Committee to the question of the private purchase of these fantastically corrosive acids? Does he agree that there is little point in restricting their sale to those below the age of 18, because those over that age can also get very annoyed and use those substances to the devastating effect that he has set out?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, but the evidence that we have seen shows that the real issue is about young people getting their hands on this acid. We have seen examples of them getting hold of it and separating it into two mineral water bottles, then carrying it around and using it to devastating effect. The measures that we have here, alongside the measures on possession of acid in a public place, will combine to make a big difference to the situation we find ourselves in today.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

**Sajid Javid:** On acid?

**Sir Edward Davey:** Yes. The Home Secretary is absolutely right to legislate for this offence. Will he tell the House how he and his colleagues will ensure that local authorities, trading standards, the police and others will be supported in enforcing this offence, to ensure that the new powers are actually used?

**Sajid Javid:** I must point out that when I said to the right hon. Gentleman, “On acid?” I was not asking him if he was on acid. It was a more general question, although I noticed that he readily jumped up and said yes. He makes an important point about ensuring that once the changes are made, all those who need to be aware of them will get training in the process of bringing them about. As he knows, this will involve trading standards and local authorities, and we are in touch with those groups. By the time the Bill has progressed and hopefully achieved Royal Assent, we will have worked quite intensively with the groups that have an interest in this to ensure that the measures in the Bill are well understood.

If I may turn to knives, it is already against the law to sell knives to under-18s, but some online sellers effectively ignore this. Sadly, such knives can get into the hands of young people and this has led to tragic deaths. We will stop that by ensuring that proper age checks are in place at the point of sale. We will stop the delivery to a home address of knives that can cause serious injury. We will also crack down on the overseas sales of knives by making it an offence to deliver them to a person under 18 in this country. I find it appalling that vicious weapons are on open sale and easily available. It shocks me that flick knives are still available despite being banned as long ago as 1959, and that zombie knives, knuckledusters and other dreadful weapons are still in wide circulation. The Bill will therefore make it an offence to possess such weapons, whether in private or on the streets, and it will go further and extend the current ban on offensive weapons in schools to further education premises.

**Andrew Rosindell:** A young man was murdered with a knife in terrible circumstances in Romford on Saturday evening. We can ban these weapons if we like, but the Home Secretary needs to be aware that if someone with criminal intent wants to get hold of one, they will find a way. I commend the Bill and I will support it, but surely we should also be looking at how young people are being brought up. We should look at what is happening in the home and in schools and at whether young people are being taught the values of right and wrong and behaving in a decent way. They can learn this from early childhood, and schools have a role to play in enforcing discipline. Parental guidance and strong support from families are also important. The family unit is important if young people are to grow up in a society where they can live freely without committing these kinds of crimes. Should we not be looking at the whole thing in a rounded way, not just banning things? Should we not be looking at how we can ensure that young people grow up to be good citizens of this country?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend has raised the death of Jordan Douherly, which tragically occurred this weekend following a knife attack, and I am glad that he has made

that important point. While the Bill can achieve a few things—we have talked about acid and knives falling into the wrong hands, for example—no Bill can by itself stop someone who is intent on taking this kind of vicious action. As he says, that requires a much more holistic approach to ensure that all aspects of government and non-Government bodies, charities and others are involved. Education is also a vital part of that, as is parenting. In some cases, there is better parenting, but there are no easy answers to any of this. He is absolutely right to suggest that we need to have a much more holistic approach. I can assure him that this is exactly why the serious violence taskforce has been created, and this is exactly the kind of work that we are trying to achieve.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): The Home Secretary will know that, tragically, we have had nine deaths related to youth violence in my constituency over the past year. I have some sympathy with what the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) has just said, but these things can happen to any family. The groomers out there find children from all kinds of families, and I do not want anyone watching this debate to believe that it cannot happen to them or to their children. We all need to be vigilant, and I am looking forward to the progress that the Home Secretary’s working party will make.

**Sajid Javid:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. She has made a vital point. Sadly, anyone can be on the receiving end of this violence. Tragically, we see that in the UK every year, but we all recognise that there has been a significant increase this year, and we need to work together to combat that. Anyone can be a victim.

Finally, I want to turn to an issue that we seem to have discussed in some detail already: the measure on firearms. The Bill will prohibit certain powerful firearms including high-energy rifles and rapid-firing rifles. As we have heard, hon. Members on both sides of the House have different views on this. While preparing the Bill, we have listened to evidence from security, police and other experts, but I am more than happy to listen to hon. Members from both sides, to take their views into account and to work with them to ensure that we do much more to bring about increased public safety.

**Lady Hermon:** Will the Home Secretary give way?

**Sajid Javid:** I will take one final intervention, then conclude.

**Lady Hermon:** I am very grateful to the Home Secretary for allowing me to intervene again. He will be well aware that, yesterday, the Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland was appointed as the Garda commissioner, which is a brilliant appointment. One of the means by which the Home Office should try to ensure that the dangerous corrosive substances and knives banned under the legislation will not come across the border from the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland—we will not have physical infrastructure on the border after Brexit—is to call the new Garda commissioner and his new team when he is in post. I make that warm recommendation following that excellent appointment to the Garda Síochána in the Republic of Ireland.

**Sajid Javid:** I commend the Garda on their appointment. The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service will be in touch with the new head of the Garda in his new role. I am sure it is an opportunity to discuss such cross-border issues and see how we can co-operate even more.

hope the measures in the Bill will attract widespread support on both sides of the House. They fill an important gap in the law, and they give the police, prosecutors and others the tools they need to fight these terrible crimes. The Bill will help to make all our communities safer by helping to get dangerous weapons off our streets. As Home Secretary, I will be relentless in ensuring that our streets remain safe. I commend the Bill to the House.

2.21 pm

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is important to begin on a note of agreement. The Opposition pledged in this House that the Government would have our support if they came forward with measures on acid sale and possession and further measures to combat knife crime, so we will support the limited but necessary measures in the Bill. Throughout the Committee stage, we will take a constructive approach in areas in which we believe it needs strengthening.

In and of themselves, the measures cannot bear down on a violent surge that has left communities reeling. That will require a much more comprehensive change. It is as well to look at the context of the Bill. Knife crime offences reached record levels in the year to December 2017. Homicides involving knives increased by 22%, and violent crime overall has more than doubled in the past five years to a record level. The senseless murder of 15-year-old Jordan Douherty, who was stabbed after a birthday party in Romford community centre over the weekend, brought the number of murder investigations to over 80 in London alone this year.

As we have heard, the problem is far from being just a London one. In my home city of Sheffield, which historically and until very recently was considered to be one of the safest cities in the UK, there was a 51% increase in violent crime last year on a 62% increase the year before. That is not a spike or a blip, but a trend enveloping a generation of young people and it requires immediate national action.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that what is omitted is of far greater consequence than what has made it into the Government's serious violence strategy and their legislative response today. First, it must be said that unveiling a strategy that made no mention of police numbers was a serious mistake that reinforced the perception that tiptoeing around the Prime Minister's legacy at the Home Office matters more than community safety. The Home Secretary might not want today's debate to be about police numbers, because a dangerous delusion took hold of his predecessors that police numbers do not make the blindest bit of difference to the rise in serious violence, but that view is not widely shared. The Met Commissioner Cressida Dick has said she is "certain" that police cuts have contributed to serious violence. Home Office experts have said it is likely that police cuts have contributed too. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary said in March that the police were under such strain that the lives of vulnerable people were being put at risk, with forces so stretched that they cannot respond to emergency calls.

Charge rates for serious violence have fallen as the detective crisis continues, undermining the deterrent effect, but still Ministers pretend that a staggering reduction of more than 21,000 police officers since 2010 has had no impact whatsoever.

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): In the west midlands, the Labour police and crime commissioner has been able to raise additional funds through an increase in the precept, yet he has chosen to put no extra police on the beat, particularly in my constituency. Regardless of how much money is available, we have to get over the obstacle that police and crime commissioners might decide to spend it differently.

**Louise Haigh:** Recruitment is a matter for chief constables. My understanding is that West Midlands police are undergoing a recruitment drive. Obviously, I cannot speak to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but how chief constables spend the money the precept raises is up to them. The issue we have with using the precept to raise funds for the police—the House has rehearsed this time and again—is that a 2% increase in council tax in areas such as the west midlands will raise significantly less than in other areas of the country such as Surrey or Suffolk. That is why we opposed that fundamentally unfair way to increase funding for our police forces.

The reduction in the number of officers has reduced the ability of the police to perform hotspot proactive policing and targeted interventions that gather intelligence and build relationships with communities. These not only help the police to respond to crime but help them to prevent it from happening in the first place. That is the bedrock of policing in our country. Community policing enables policing by consent, but has been decimated over the past eight years. That has contributed not only to the rise in serious violence but to the corresponding fall in successful prosecutions. Not only are more people committing serious violent offences, but more are getting away with it.

**Stephen Doughty:** I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. She will be aware that I have long campaigned for Cardiff to get additional resources because of the challenges it has as a capital city. I am glad that the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service has agreed to meet me, the chief constable and the police and crime commissioner in south Wales to discuss these very real concerns. Does my hon. Friend agree that community policing resources are absolutely crucial? Community police can deal with the grooming that my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) described, whether it is to do with knives and violence, drugs or extremism.

**Louise Haigh:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, who is a committed campaigner for Cardiff to receive the police resources it needs. That is why the Labour manifesto put neighbourhood policing at its heart. Neighbourhood policing not only enables the police to respond better to crime, but it is an important intelligence-gathering tool for tackling terrorism, more serious crime and organised criminal activity.

The proposals in the Bill to strengthen the law to meet the changing climate are welcome, but, without adequate enforcement, they cannot have the effect we need them to have. The Government must drop their

dangerous delusion that cutting the police by more than any other developed country over the past eight years bar Iceland, Lithuania and Bulgaria has not affected community safety. They must make a cast-iron commitment that in the spending review they will give the police the resources they need to restore the strength of neighbourhood policing so recklessly eroded over the past eight years.

**Andrew Rosindell:** One problem in my constituency following the murder on Saturday evening is the feeling that the police do not have enough resources. I agree with the hon. Lady. We cannot keep reducing resources for policing and say it will not have an effect on crime; clearly it will. However, Havering in my area, for example, is part of Greater London, so the resources are allocated by the Mayor of London. Our area gets far less than other parts of London. Yes, let us have more resources, but does the hon. Lady agree that areas like mine need a fairer slice of the cake? If crime is moving out to areas such as Essex, we need resources. We are not inner London—we are completely different—and therefore need a different style of policing and adequate resources to make our communities safe.

**Louise Haigh:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that resources should follow demand. That is why it is a crying shame that the Government have kicked the can down the road on the police funding formula, which has denied resources to areas of the country that are in serious need of police resources. That funding formula should be based on demand.

**Vicky Ford:** Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), will the hon. Lady join me in thanking Essex police and congratulating them on the 150 officers they are adding to our force?

**Louise Haigh:** It is welcome when any police force recruits additional police officers. I do not have to hand the number of officers that Essex has lost since 2010, but I imagine that it is significantly more than 150.

Let us look at the Home Office research on the drivers of trends in violent crime. Neighbourhood policing was certainly mentioned; social media was acknowledged to have played a role, as were changes to the drug market, as the Home Secretary mentioned, particularly in respect of the purity of crack cocaine. They are all factors in the spate of recent murders, but one of the most important factors that the analysis showed was that a larger cohort of young people are now particularly vulnerable to involvement in violent crime because of significant increases in the numbers of homeless children, children in care and children excluded from school. Just 2% of the general population have been excluded from school, compared with 49% of the prison population. As much as this Bill is, and should be, about taking offensive weapons off our streets, the issues around serious violent crime are also a story of vulnerability.

The Children's Commissioner has shown that 70,000 under-25-year-olds are currently feared to be part of gang networks. The unavoidable conclusion is that, for a growing, precarious and highly vulnerable cohort of children, the structures and safety nets that are there to protect them are failing.

Behind this tragic spate of violence is a story of missed opportunities to intervene as services retreat; of children without a place to call home shunted between temporary accommodation, with their parents at the mercy of private landlords; of patterns of truancy and expulsions; and of troubled families ignored until the moment of crisis hits. The most despicable criminals are exploiting the space where well-run and effective early intervention, prevention and diversion strategies once existed.

As the Children's Commissioner notes, the pursuit of young children is now

“a systematic and well-rehearsed business model.”

The Home Secretary himself highlighted the importance of early intervention in tackling violence when he told “The Andrew Marr Show” that we must deal with the root causes, but the £20 million a year we spend on early intervention and prevention has to be seen in the context of the £387 million cut from youth services, the £1 billion cut from children's services, and the £2.7 billion cut from school budgets since 2015. For most communities, the funding provided by the serious violence strategy will not make any difference at all. How can it even begin to plug the gap?

We know what happens when early intervention disappears. A groundbreaking report 18 years ago by the Audit Commission described the path of a young boy called James who found himself at the hard end of the criminal justice system before the last Labour Government's progressive efforts to address the root causes of crime through early intervention:

“Starting at the age of five, his mother persistently requested help in managing his behaviour and addressing his learning difficulties. Despite formal assessments at an early age for special educational needs, no educational help was forthcoming until he reached the age of eight and even then no efforts were made to address his behaviour problems in the home. By the age of ten, he had his first brush with the law but several requests for a learning mentor came to nothing and his attendance at school began to suffer. By now he was falling behind his peers and getting into trouble at school, at home and in his...neighbourhood...”

Within a year James was serving an intensive community supervision order and...only then did the authorities acknowledge that the family had multiple problems and needed a full assessment. A meeting of professionals was arranged but no one directly involved with James, other than his Head Teacher, attended, no social worker was allocated and none of the plans that were drawn up to help James were implemented. Within a short space of time, he was sent to a Secure Training Centre and on release...no services were received by James or his family. He was back in custody within a few months.”

How many Jameses have we come across in our constituencies? How many mothers like James's have we met in our surgeries? The pattern described here could just as well be attributed to a young man I had been seeking to help over the past year but whose life was tragically ended just last month. He was stabbed to death in my constituency, and another 15-year-old charged with his murder.

It very much feels as though we have learned these lessons before and are now repeating the same mistakes.

**Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con):** Given the intelligence we have received that the Mayor of London is doubling his PR budget, what role does the hon. Lady think he can play in trying to address the urgent problem in this city?

**Louise Haigh:** The Mayor of London has put £150 million into recruiting additional police officers. I appreciate the serious concerns in London but this is a national problem, as I have made clear and as the Home Secretary has acknowledged. This is not a London-only problem. Indeed, the increase in violence in London is actually lower than in other parts of the country, which is why a national solution is required. It is politically easy to pass the blame on to the Mayor of London, but it simply is not the case that that is the only solution.

**Sir Edward Davey:** The hon. Lady is speaking huge common sense, as everyone in this House knows. Anyone who looks at our prison population knows that people in prison are suffering from mental health problems and learning disabilities, all of which could have been dealt with through early intervention. I ask her not to be put off by completely irrelevant interventions.

**Louise Haigh:** The right hon. Gentleman need not worry; I will not be put off at all by interventions from Government Members.

**Will Quince (Colchester) (Con):** The hon. Lady mentions that this is not only a London problem, but a lot of it does emanate from London. The county line operations and many other things start in our big cities, so will she join me in encouraging the Metropolitan police to work far more closely with other forces to make sure we break these county lines? The county lines are now heading across the country, but they largely start in London.

**Louise Haigh:** I completely agree that the county lines emanate from many metropolitan areas, and certainly not just London—they originate with organised criminal gangs in Birmingham and on Merseyside, too. I commend the Government's approach through the national county lines co-ordination centre. Working between police forces is a nut that we really have to crack, because the county lines business model has been developed to exploit the challenges that police forces and other agencies experience in working together.

**Andrew Rosindell:** I agree with much of what the hon. Lady says, but can she envisage how local people in Havering feel? We are part of Essex, yet we are lumped into Greater London. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) proudly speaks of 150 new policemen for Essex, but people who come to Romford will realise that we are Essex, rather than London. However, we get so few resources from the Mayor of London—we really are left out. We are getting no extra policemen and far fewer resources than we need.

Will the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) please speak to Sadiq Khan and see whether he will prioritise the London Borough of Havering and give us the resources we need, or whether he will give us the chance to be a unitary authority outside of the Greater London area so we can manage our own resources and keep our communities safe?

**Louise Haigh:** I am sure Chelmsford has received both policemen and policewomen. I am sure the Mayor of London will be watching this debate closely, but I commit to passing the hon. Gentleman's remarks on to him.

**Stephen Doughty:** My hon. Friend is making some excellent points, and she will recognise that in Wales the Welsh Labour Government have invested in keeping police community support officers in our communities, which has made a huge difference in my own community. Will she also pay tribute to the many voluntary organisations that are working with young people in particular? Tiger Bay and Llanrumney Phoenix amateur boxing clubs in my patch are working with young people who are very much at risk of being groomed or caught up in such things, and they are making a huge impact on those individuals' lives.

**Louise Haigh:** I am grateful for that intervention. Across the country, such community organisations are filling a vacuum that has been created by Government cuts over the past eight years. They are doing sterling work with at-risk young people, and preventing many of them from falling into exploitation and violence.

I take this opportunity to commend the work of the Scottish Government not just through the violence reduction unit, which I am sure we will hear much of in today's debate, but in their commitment to long-term research on the patterns of youth offending and violence. The last major national study of youth crime in England and Wales was 10 years ago, which means we do not know the impact of social media or, indeed, of austerity. We urge the Government to repeat that survey, to commission research on why young people carry weapons and on the risk factors that lead to violent offending, and to commission an evidence-based analysis of the success of various interventions. That could build on the excellent work led by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), who pioneered the Youth Violence Commission.

In Scotland, the Edinburgh study of youth transitions and crime found that violent offenders are significantly more likely than non-violent young people to be victims of crime and adult harassment, to be engaged in self-harm and para-suicidal behaviour, to be drug users or regular alcohol users and, for girls in particular, to be from a socially deprived background.

Although, of course, I accept wholeheartedly the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) that any young person can be at risk of exploitation, it is in the public good for such vulnerable young people to receive targeted interventions at a young age, rather than to see them fall into the costly criminal justice system and their lives wasted. We hope to see significantly more action from the Government on that.

**Vicky Ford:** I am a member of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, and we have been looking at the evidence on early intervention. As has been highlighted, there are areas of excellent practice, including Manchester and, I am glad to say, Essex. Will the hon. Lady look at those areas of excellent practice? I reject the suggestion that, somehow, this is linked to cuts. Our good practice in delivering early intervention helps to make the difference.

**Louise Haigh:** I heartily recommend that the hon. Lady reads the Home Office's own analysis, which suggests that cuts to neighbourhood policing and early intervention have played a part in the rise of serious

violence, but of course I accept that some excellent work is going on throughout the country. That is exactly the point I am making: we need a proper evidence-based analysis of that work to make sure that we roll out the successful pilots.

Let me turn to the possession and sale of corrosives. We welcome the move to clarify the law. In March, the Sentencing Council explicitly listed acid as a potentially dangerous weapon, but it is welcome that that is made clear in the legislation. Nevertheless, concerns remain about the lack of controls on reportable substances. We welcome the passing of secondary legislation to designate sulphuric acid as a reportable substance, but the time has come for a broader look at the two classes of poisons to determine which are causing harm and should therefore be subject to stricter controls.

The purpose of the legislation prior to the Deregulation Act 2015 was to allow the sale of commonly used products while protecting the individual from their inherent dangers. The sale of such poisons as hydrochloric, ammonia, hydrofluoric, nitric and phosphoric acids was restricted to retail pharmacies and to businesses whose premises were on local authorities' lists of sellers. That situation was not perfect, but in considering reform we should note that the Poisons Board preferred a third option, between the previous system and what we have today, which would have designated as regulated all poisons listed as reportable substances, meaning that they could be sold only in registered pharmacies, with buyers required to enter their details.

The Government have conceded the point that some acids that are currently on open sale are dangerous and so should not be sold to under-18s. Schedule 1 lists hydrochloric acid and ammonia as two such examples, but we know that only one in five acid attacks are conducted by under-18s. That means that four in five attackers will be free to purchase reportable substances despite the clear evidence of harm. Of the 408 reported acid attacks, ammonia was used in 69 incidents. In the light of that, will the Government conduct a full review of the designation of reportable substances and bring forward regulations to re-designate those causing clear harm?

We note that the Government have failed to extend to corrosive substances the specific provisions on the possession of knives in schools. There can surely be no justification, beyond a reasonable defence, for the possession of corrosive substances on a school premises. If we are to send a message that the possession of corrosive substances will be treated with the same seriousness as the possession of knives, it should follow that the provisions that apply in respect of knives in schools are extended to acid.

On knife possession, the measures on remote sales and residential premises are important, but a cursory internet search demonstrates the easy availability of a wide range of weapons that are terrifying in their familiarity: knives disguised as credit cards and as bracelets; weapons designed with the explicit purpose to harm and to conceal. With the increasing use of such weapons and the widespread use of machetes in certain parts of the country, we wish to explore with the Government what further action can be taken to bear down on such pernicious weapons, and how apps and platforms on which such weapons are made readily available can be held to account.

As the Bill is considered in Committee, we wish to explore the concerns, mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) earlier, of retailers and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers about the offences imposed on retailers.

**David Hanson:** As the chair of the USDAW group of MPs—I declare that interest—I welcome that commitment. I was greatly encouraged by the fact that the Home Secretary said that he will look into this issue. I hope that we can consider it on a cross-party basis to ensure that shop workers are free from fear and that regulations can be put in place to make sure that we defend those who will have to defend the Bill's provisions on the frontline, in shops.

**Louise Haigh:** My right hon. Friend is a long-standing campaigner for the rights of shop workers and I echo his point about hoping that we can do this on a cross-party basis.

Concerns remain about the open sale of knives in smaller retail stores, which is an issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft). Many of the larger stores have taken steps to secure knives in cabinets, but the fact that it is far too easy to steal knives from smaller stores renders much of the control of knife sales ineffective.

It was surprising to see that higher education institutions have been omitted from the extension of possession offences, given that they were considered in the consultation earlier this year. The justification that the Government gave for the proposal then was, I think, right, so I am interested to hear why higher education institutions have been omitted from the Bill.

On firearms, the laws in the UK are among the toughest in the world, but there is concern that restricted supply might be leading to the repurposing of obsolete firearms, meaning that law enforcement must be alive to the changing nature of firearms use. There has been a significant rise in the use of antique guns that have been repurposed to commit serious crime: 30% of the guns used in crime in 2015-16 were of obsolete calibre. The repurposing of handguns designed to fire gas canisters, and of imitation weapons, has grown in the past 10 years. We intend to press the Government on whether the laws surrounding decommissioned firearms, which are not subject to the Firearms Act 1968, need to be strengthened. The availability of firearms has been shown to be increasing through the legal-to-illegal route, so we very much support the Government's proposals.

**Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab):** My hon. Friend is making a powerful case, but as someone who has recently renewed their shotgun licence, I should say that that is a very thorough process. I would not want the wrong impression to be given of people who shoot for sport—I shoot only clays; I do not shoot animals—because it is a very responsible sport.

**Louise Haigh:** My hon. Friend brings his own personal experience to the debate and makes an important point. I am sure that will be heard in Committee.

Finally, we believe that the Bill is a missed opportunity for victims. The Conservative party manifestos in 2015 and 2017 promised to enshrine in law the rights of victims, a group too often neglected by the criminal

[*Louise Haigh*]

justice system. With crime surging and the perpetrators of crime more likely than ever to escape justice, the Bill should have gone further and looked to strengthen the rights of victims of crime.

**Vicky Ford:** I thank the hon. Lady for giving way yet again. On the point about repurposing or reactivating deactivated firearms, will she mention for the record that of course the reactivation of a deactivated firearm is in itself a criminal act?

**Louise Haigh:** Yes, and I was not trying to suggest otherwise, but, as I have laid out, the number of crimes using repurposed weapons has increased significantly over the past 10 years, so it is clear that in considering the Bill we should look into how we can restrict the availability of decommissioned weapons.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): On the subject of a victims law, Sharon Fearon is the mother of Shaquan, a young boy who was murdered in my constituency, and there was never a conviction in that case. Sharon and I met Minister after Minister, including the Attorney General, and the one thing we were promised was that there would be a victims law and that their voices would be heard.

**Louise Haigh:** My hon. Friend has done sterling work over the past three years on youth violence, and particularly on the rights of victims, and her work is one of the reasons we think it is so important to strengthen the rights of victims through this Bill. I hope that we can do that on a cross-party basis, given the promises that were made in the 2015 and 2017 Conservative manifestos.

We would like to see a recognition that the rights of victims should be paramount, so we want consideration to be given to the introduction of an independent advocate, in line with the recommendations of the Victims' Commissioner, to help victims of serious crime to navigate the range of services in the aftermath of a serious crime. With fewer than one in five violent crimes resulting in a charge, we will seek to legally entrench a victim's right to a review of a decision by the police or the Crown Prosecution Service not to bring criminal charges or to discontinue a case. With homicide rates surging, Labour will also seek to provide national standards for the periodic review of homicide cases, because many families are deeply concerned at how cases can often be left to gather dust, with nobody brought to justice.

In the debate around serious violence, it is vital that the rights of victims are not forgotten. The aftermath of such an incident is traumatic and disorienting, with victims who are struggling to deal with their own personal trauma forced to navigate the at times baffling criminal justice system. As the number of victims of serious incidents is growing, now is the time to strengthen their rights.

I confirm again that we support the measures before us and will seek to be as constructive as possible in enhancing them. I hope that as deliberations on the Bill continue, we can have a full debate about adverse childhood experiences and the consequent policy considerations, such as trauma-informed policing and schooling, and about the implications of school exclusions and the

increasing number of homeless children and children in care. As a result, I hope that we can improve on the measures in the Bill to begin to tackle the root causes of this growing epidemic. Violent crime is a contagious disease that is infecting communities across our nation. Without concerted political will and sustained Government investment, we will continue to see many more unnecessary tragedies.

2.49 pm

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): This is a substantial Bill that has been published only relatively recently. After today's debate, I shall continue to look into some of the points that have been raised with me about the Bill, as clearly some need further investigation, particularly those in relation to guns, as we have heard from some of my hon. Friends.

There is clearly a problem with violent crime, knife crime and the horrific acid attacks that we have all heard about. There are many things that I would like to see us do to curb those terrible crimes. The shadow Minister knows that I totally agree with her about police numbers. That would be a good place to start. We could also stop releasing prisoners automatically halfway through their sentences, and then giving them scandalous 28-day fixed-term recalls when they reoffend. We could stop faffing around and interfering with the police on stop and search and let the police get on with their job. We could also ensure that much tougher sentences are handed down by our courts in the first place to persistent and serious offenders.

This Bill is clearly the Government's attempt to do something. I just hope, as I do with all Bills, that there are no unintended consequences. One thing that strikes me as a possible example of that is the intention to prevent online and remote retailers being able to deliver knives to residential premises. That means that people will have to pick up knives themselves, and in an age of increased internet shopping, this will reverse that trend, forcing the general public to collect their own knives and somehow get them home. I sincerely hope that ordinary, decent, law-abiding people do not get caught up in any possession charges for, for example, forgetting to remove the knife for a few days after purchase, and finding that they have no legal, lawful authority to be in possession of the blade.

The present situation is that if the knife is being delivered, it goes from the shop or warehouse straight to someone's home, so this is currently not an issue in these circumstances. Conversely, it also seems to me to be a very handy possible excuse for someone caught in possession of a blade: a person just needs to buy a knife every day, and if they ever get stopped they can say that they have just bought it, as they could not buy it online, and then, presumably, they have a legal defence for carrying it.

Knives are very difficult to control, because they are everywhere. How many knives are in each and every household? That will not change. Knives will always be very accessible indeed. There is not really any need for anyone under the age of 18 to buy an average knife, as they will already easily be able to get hold of one if they so wish. What we can and must do is crack down on those who think that it is a good idea to carry them around with a view to using them in an attack, or

defending themselves from an attack. On this point, I have some rare praise for the knife crime sentencing guidelines, which, as I understand it, have been amended recently and will increase the starting point for possession of a blade to about six months' custody.

Bearing that in mind, the sentences proposed in the Bill for actions that are currently perfectly legal—in relation to traders for non-compliance after this Bill becomes law—also range up to 51 weeks. Although I appreciate that that is a maximum, I am not sure that these offences are in anything like the same league. Perhaps more pertinently, we were told, just the other day when we were discussing the sentences for those who attack emergency service workers, that it was right that the maximum should be set at a year. Therefore, giving 51 weeks to a trader for posting a knife to a residential address and also to someone for attacking an emergency service worker does not necessarily sit well with me.

Let me turn now to threatening offences with knives and offensive weapons. I should say in passing that the House should realise that, in terms of sentencing on knives, 40% of knife possession offences attracted a prison sentence—therefore 60% did not—and 62% of offences of threatening with a knife resulted in custody. Again, many offences of threatening someone with a knife—38%—do not result in a custodial sentence. In 2016, somebody with 14 previous knife offences was still not sent to prison for committing a further knife offence.

**Lyn Brown:** I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I know that he will hear me when I tell him that, in my constituency and in other similar constituencies, some young people carry, unfortunately, because they are afraid. Simply brandishing a knife does not necessarily mean that that person wants to use it, or that they are anything other than terrified by the situation in which they find themselves. I am pleased that our courts are showing some discretion. I urge him to consider carefully where he is going with this.

**Philip Davies:** Where I am going is to make this point: somebody who had 14 previous knife offences and who was then convicted of another knife offence should be sent to prison. The hon. Lady might not agree with that—that is her prerogative—but she will find herself in a minority on that particular view.

I hope the Minister will listen carefully to my next point. Serious offences with knives and offensive weapons, not necessarily trading offensive weapons, should come within the unduly lenient sentence scheme. Perhaps that is something that could be addressed in this Bill. I also wish to support an extension of the principle that committing a subsequent similar offence means a mandatory sentence. I would like to see a sentencing escalator, which means that every time a person is recommitted for the same offence they get a higher sentence than they received the previous time.

**Andrew Rosindell:** Very quickly, I wholeheartedly endorse everything that my hon. Friend is saying. Does he agree that there must be a deterrent? If there is no deterrent, the crimes will carry on being committed and there will be no end to this. The punishment must fit the crime, and people must be deterred from committing these acts of violence.

**Philip Davies:** Absolutely. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend.

**Mr John Hayes** *rose*—

**Philip Davies:** I will give way briefly to my right hon. Friend and then I will make some progress because I know that other people wish to speak.

**Mr Hayes:** In the same spirit as my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), I say that the key thing is that the criminal justice system must be retributive. This is not about treating people who are sick, but about punishing people who are guilty. Until we send out that signal from this place, the general public will believe, with cause, that we do not understand what they know to be happening in their communities.

**Philip Davies:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We hear very little in this place about people being punished for committing crimes, but there is nothing wrong with it. Again, on these kinds of issue, this House is completely out of touch with the general public in their views on law and order, sentencing and the criminal justice system, but my right hon. Friend, as usual, is not.

I think that there is a quite an important drafting mistake in the Bill, and the House of Commons Library seems to agree with me. Clause 26 amends the two Acts dealing with the offence of threatening with a knife and changes the test regarding the level of physical harm likely to result from the knife. I welcome that. I certainly welcome the thrust of what this clause seeks to do. As the clause is worded, it will still leave in law the definition of violence as being the original higher test. This is what the Library says on this point, and hopefully the Minister will take note of it.

“Section 139AA (4) and section 1A (2) both define the term ‘serious physical harm’, which forms part of the current wording of the offences set out in section 139AA and section 1A. However, the term ‘serious physical harm’ is not used in the proposed new wording for the offence as set out in clause 26, and would instead be replaced by the term ‘physical harm’. Clause 26 does not set out any particular definition for the term ‘physical harm’, nor does it amend or remove the existing definition of ‘serious physical harm’ in sections 139AA (4) and section 1A (2).”

I do not know what the Government's intention is here. If they want to define the new term “physical harm”, the existing wording in sections 139AA (4) and 1A (2) would need to be amended to set out a suitable definition. If they want to leave the new term undefined for the courts to interpret, the existing wording in those measures that I mentioned should be removed altogether.

I hope that the Minister will go away and look at this, because I think that there has been a genuine mistake. I think I know what the Government are trying to do, and they have half done it, but they have not squared the circle.

I want to see a rare outbreak of common sense with regard to criminal justice legislation. Clause 27 will extend the “threatening with a knife” offence to further educational establishments. Although that is a welcome step, it does not go nearly far enough as far as I am concerned. I will be tabling amendments to replace this clause to make it an offence to threaten somebody with a knife anywhere.

[Philip Davies]

I cannot for the life of me see why someone who threatens somebody with a knife should not be prosecuted for this offence, regardless of where the offence takes place. Currently, it has to be in a public place or on school premises, and the Bill will extend that to further education premises. But why should it not apply to all premises? Why is threatening somebody with a knife an offence only if it is in a public place, school premises or a further education establishment? Threatening somebody with a knife should be an offence wherever it happens—surely that is common sense—but the law is not being extended in that way.

I am afraid that I am firmly of the belief that the Ministry of Justice has needlessly tied itself in knots over this issue for years. When the offence of threatening with a knife was introduced, it included a defence of lawful possession of the knife. This was clearly ludicrous and would have seriously affected convictions. Would anyone at the Ministry of Justice listen? No. How can the possession of a knife be a defence for threatening somebody with that knife? But the Ministry of Justice would not listen. I am not a lawyer—I say that with some pride—yet, even with a House full of legal eagles, the Bill would have gone through with this glaring drafting error, which seems to have arisen because the legislation on possession of a knife has simply been copied and pasted, with the “threatening” bit added instead. Clearly, lawfully carrying the knife is a defence in the case of possession, but it should never have been a defence for threatening with that knife.

In desperation, I went to see the then Prime Minister, David Cameron. It was only when he agreed, weighed in and overruled the Ministry of Justice that the Bill was thankfully changed before it was too late. People can check the record; it is absolutely true. That is why I have a very keen interest in this particular area of legislation.

The other glaring omission, which is quite possibly a throwback to the same original bad drafting, is that the offence is not committed in private premises. Possessing a knife in the home is clearly perfectly fine and legal—naturally. But why should it not be an offence to threaten with a knife in a domestic context? In a written question last November, I asked the then Secretary of State for the Home Department

“if she will extend the offence of threatening with a knife to incidents taking place on private property.”

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who is in her place today, responded:

“It is already an offence to threaten someone with a knife whether in public or on private property.”

Well, if we read this provision literally, it clearly is not.

I followed up with a letter. As the Government seemed to think that that was already an offence, I hoped that when they realised that it was not, they would be keen to make it one. Alas, it was not so simple. The latest line seems to be to say that there are other offences that can be charged. Well, I know that. Thanks to the Public Order Act 1986 there are actually more offences that can be charged in a public place. Yet this was not a reason to stop the offence of threatening with a knife in a public place becoming law, so why should it stop the offence of threatening somebody with a knife in a private place becoming law?

The trouble is that the various departmental bubbles do not always appreciate the real world. I know of real-life, actual cases where people should have been charged with threatening with a knife, but they could not be charged because it did not happen in a public place. The alternative charges to which we are referred do not attract the same sentence as threatening with a knife, and therefore do not reflect the seriousness of the offence.

Just one example was of a man in a hostel who threatened a female member of staff with a knife and had to be dealt with by an armed response unit. That must have been particularly terrifying, given that the member of staff concerned knew only too well of the man’s previous violent record, as the hostel was housing him on release from a prison sentence for violence. As the hostel was not a public place or a school, the offence of threatening with a knife could not be used by the Crown Prosecution Service. I understand that this was specifically confirmed by the prosecutor when the case came to court. An offence with a six-month maximum penalty was substituted and, with the man’s guilty plea, the maximum sentence available to the court was four months. This would have been avoided if the law had applied to all places equally, as it quite clearly should.

I really hope that I will get some cross-party support for this amendment so that we can make a positive change to the Bill. I am not, perhaps, always known as someone who unites the House—at least, not with me, but sometimes against me—but on this occasion there is not actually a great deal for people to disagree about. There may be some resistance from civil servants, who do not like any ideas other than the ones that they have come up with themselves, but I would like to hear, in the real world, just one good argument for not taking this opportunity to change the Bill in this small way, but in a way that would make the law much better and safer for many of our constituents.

Threatening somebody with a knife is a serious offence that we should crack down on. It should not make any difference where the act of threatening with a knife takes place, so I hope that my amendment will be accepted in due course.

The Minister and I have spoken. I very much appreciate the time that she has spent with me on this issue, but I would welcome a commitment on the Floor of the House that she will look seriously at this again. I hope that she will think twice before peddling a civil service standard reply, which I am sure that she would never do, but which I am sure the civil servants would always encourage her to do. She must look at this matter herself. If she does, I am sure that she will see that this is a very sensible amendment, which would make a big difference to the Bill.

3.5 pm

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): On behalf of the Scottish National party, let me welcome the Bill. We certainly support the broad principles behind it and fully support its Second Reading. The Bill will help to reduce the possession and use of weapons, including corrosive substances, so we look forward to engaging with the Secretary of State and his team as it progresses through the House. As is evident from the Bill, there has already been extensive and constructive engagement between

the Government here and the Scottish Government, reflecting the fact that these issues are a mixture of devolved and reserved matters.

The dramatic rise in crimes related to noxious or corrosive substances is appalling, with 454 occurring in London alone during 2016. But while London is currently the epicentre of this horrendous new form of crime, gruesome incidents involving the use of such substances have ruined lives right across the UK, including through an attack in my constituency that left three men with life-changing burns. It is extraordinary to think that the UK now has one of the highest rates of acid attacks in the world, and a distinct feature of the issue in the UK seems to be its close connection to gang culture.

We welcome moves to clamp down on how these substances are obtained and used, especially the ban on sales to under-18s of the most concentrated and dangerous corrosive substances, and restrictions on how such substances can be delivered. We particularly welcome the offence of possession in a public place, given concerns that corrosive substances may be becoming more widely used in attacks because they represent a so-called “safe” weapon to carry for those who are looking to commit a violent crime, as opposed to carrying a weapon that already attracts a custodial sentence.

When we debated corrosive substances in Westminster Hall in December last year, I welcomed the interim measures that the Government had implemented while their consultation was under way. During that debate, we also explored the options open to the Government on how best to tackle corrosive substances. As well as the measures that the Government have outlined in the Bill, other possibilities included identifying the most harmful corrosive substances that are currently only considered reportable under the Poisons Act 1972 and reclassifying them as regulated substances. That would mean that members of the public would require a licence to purchase some substances. Assuming that the Bill receives its Second Reading, it would be worth returning to that issue in Committee so that we can explore what role that alternative scheme might still have.

There are other detailed issues that we want to explore, such as whether the Bill properly covers all situations that we would want it to, including the supply of substances that does not involve payment. The Bill currently seems focused on the sale of substances, so I am not sure whether the offence would cover cases in which there is no financial consideration. None the less, the Bill's broad thrust is certainly welcome.

We also welcome the broad thrust of the changes that are being introduced in relation to knives. Members do not need me to rehearse the tragic consequences that knife crimes are all too often inflicting on our citizens. We particularly welcome moves to put in place further safeguards regarding the purchase of knives remotely so that existing laws against sales to young people can no longer be circumvented. The requirement for adequate age verification checks for online sales could be particularly important. Indeed, the then Justice Secretary in Scotland wrote to the UK Government back in January 2017 to raise concerns about the online sale of knives and the need for a joined-up approach, and that is what is happening through the Bill.

As the Secretary of State said, it is already an offence to sell knives to anyone under the age of 18, including online. The maximum penalty in Scotland for possession

of a knife was increased in March 2016 from four years' imprisonment to five years' imprisonment. People who are convicted of a crime of violence in Scottish courts are now more likely to receive a custodial sentence than they were 10 years ago. The average length of custodial sentences imposed for knife crimes has more than doubled over the last decade. Ultimately, though, we cannot arrest and imprison our way out of these problems.

The Secretary of State explained some of the new work that the UK Government are undertaking to prevent knife crime and to stop people carrying knives in the first place. We welcome any emphasis on prevention. As the shadow Minister said, evidence-based investment in violence reduction programmes, especially for young people, has long been a key focus for the Scottish Government. They include the No Knives, Better Lives youth engagement programme, the national violence reduction unit, the Mentors in Violence Prevention programme, and the use of community-based officers who engage with and support students and staff in schools as part of the community policing service. That work has thankfully seen the number of young people under 18 in Scotland who are convicted of handling an offensive weapon fall from 430 in 2007-08 all the way down to 91 in 2016-17. But every young person carrying a knife, and every person who is a victim of a knife crime, is one too many; that is why we will support and engage constructively with this Bill.

On firearms, I have listened with interest to the reasoning behind the Government's proposals to extend the ban on certain firearms and firearms accessories. I am sympathetic to what they say, but we will reserve final judgment until we hear evidence in Committee.

The final word must be with the victims, as ultimately they are who the Bill is all about. Every MP will have known constituents who have been affected by the tragedy of corrosive substance crimes or knife crimes. Clearly, we all want to do everything we can so that the number of victims becomes as close to zero as we can get. Prevention is the best response and it must be our priority. Making it more difficult to obtain these substances and weapons is an important part of that, and we are therefore happy to give our support to the Bill.

3.11 pm

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I rise to support the Bill and its proposed legislative changes. I shall focus particularly on knife crime and preventive measures, notwithstanding the concerns raised by colleagues about the possible unintended consequences of some of the firearms measures. I am particularly pleased that action is being taken on zombie knives and corrosive substances. I pay tribute to the work of the *Express & Star* newspaper in the west midlands, which has been relentless in its campaign for action on knife crime, and particularly on zombie knives.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), I am also especially pleased about the Government's proposals in clause 26 which, as he outlined, change the definition of what we mean by the threat posed by somebody with an offensive weapon. I proposed such a measure at Prime Minister's questions almost five years ago following the killing of a schoolgirl on the No. 9 bus coming out of Birmingham to a school in my constituency. In principle, tightening up that definition, notwithstanding some of the concerns that my hon.

[James Morris]

Friend raised about the wording of the clause, is a significant change that will help to ensure that people are properly sentenced for threatening behaviour while using offensive weapons like knives. I very much welcome the insertion of clause 26 and the changes that that makes to the Prevention of Crime Act 1953.

The Bill has emerged out of the Government's serious violence strategy, which was published in April. That is a very interesting document, because it sets out that the Government are clear that the violent crime that we see in certain parts of our communities will not be solved just by law enforcement. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley, I am an advocate of tough sentencing and people being punished for their crimes. However, I think all Members would agree that that will not solve the underlying problems in some of our communities. That approach is necessary, but it is not sufficient to deal with this problem.

**Mr John Hayes:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. As I said earlier, the drivers—the causes—of crime are complex, as he suggests, but the way in which we deal with and respond to crime is not incompatible with taking the kind of lines that he has recommended. Both need to be addressed—the causes and the response.

**James Morris:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. I totally agree—those things are not incompatible.

What we are seeing in some of our communities is not confined just to London. My constituency is just on the fringe of Birmingham, and we have seen examples of the increasing use of offensive weapons in Birmingham and other areas throughout the country. We need to be careful about exaggerating the problem. The issue has certainly arisen, but we must not exaggerate its consequences. However, we must ask some difficult questions about what leads young people, in particular, towards gangs, and what I would call the fetishisation of weapons. What is leading to that, and to this outbreak of serious violent crime, in certain parts of our communities? The Government's serious violence strategy is quite clear that one of the drivers is drugs. It says, in particular, that increases in the dealing of crack cocaine and its supply chains are leading to gang violence. We need to be serious about addressing some of the issues of organised drug crime.

The reason why young people are turning to weapons and violence is a complex picture, and we need to face up to that complexity, notwithstanding the need for stronger sentencing. We need to look at issues around unstable family backgrounds. A lot of the kids who end up being part of gangs come from extremely unstable backgrounds.

**Lyn Brown:** I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but may I warn him about the idea that unstable family backgrounds are what leads to young people being groomed? I know of a police officer who is one of two parents and has a problem with his child being groomed and taken into the county lines orbit. I really do not want parents to believe that their children will be safe because they have two parents and even go to a Catholic church on a Sunday afternoon.

That does not make them safe. It does not mean that they will not be involved in gang culture at some point in the future.

**James Morris:** I accept what the hon. Lady says up to a point, although all the evidence, including the strong evidence that we see in the Government's serious violence strategy, is that a lot of the kids—girls and boys—who end up in the sorts of situations that may lead to serious violence have come from family situations in which they have been considerably traumatised, and trauma of that nature has led to various other consequences. We cannot shy away from that.

**Vicky Ford:** When I was involved in a Select Committee inquiry into online issues, we were given evidence that the online recruitment of children from quite stable backgrounds is now being used to bring such children into gangs. We need to realise that no child is immune.

**James Morris:** I will come on to the point about social media. I am emphasising the point about kids who come from traumatised backgrounds because we need to examine what that leads to and what its drivers are. Often it leads to such things as social exclusion, school exclusion, and a cycle of behaviour that leads to violence. This is about young people not having a stake in civilised society, as we would call it, with their values, their sense of structure and the way in which they think about the world being derived from the gang, which is where the violence and fetishisation of violence comes from.

**Eddie Hughes:** I do not want us to get stuck on this part of the debate—my hon. Friend is obviously keen to move on—but it is important. My understanding of data from Brent Council is that a typical gang member is 24 years old and was arrested for the first time at 14. Given that profile, it is likely that they will have had a troubled childhood, leading to a troubled adolescence.

**James Morris:** My hon. Friend is right. The evidence—again, this is from the Government's serious violence strategy—is that 40% of gang members have been identified with a severe behavioural problem by the age of 12. That significant number allows us to understand how we might address some of the underlying behaviours that lead to violence and the targeted approaches that are necessary to deal with that.

As Members will know, I have been a long-term campaigner for improving mental health care in this country. The Government have made significant progress on improving mental health care for children and adolescents, but we need to do more, specifically by focusing on this cohort of vulnerable children, especially those who have faced trauma and come from looked-after backgrounds.

**Will Quince:** My hon. Friend mentions vulnerable children. In so many cases, they are 12, 13 or 14 years old. Does he think the answer is to label them criminals or actually to see them for the victims they are? If we do not criminalise them, they will have life chances that do not lead to just a continuation of criminality.

**James Morris:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. There is a balance to be struck. As I said at the beginning of my speech, we need a very tough law enforcement

framework in this area. The evidence from the police is that they want that, because it provides a deterrent. However, he is exactly right that the balancing item in the argument, as expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), is that we need to understand the underlying drivers. That is why, as the Government recognise in their strategy, we need to focus on prevention and diversion strategies that take young people away from the criminal justice system. One weakness of the criminal justice system, for historical reasons, is that it can lead to a self-reinforcing cycle whereby young people get trapped in the system and cannot escape it.

**Mr John Hayes:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way a second time. This dilemma has bedevilled youth justice in particular since the 1960s. The Children and Young Persons Act 1969 which, broadly speaking, took a treatmentist approach to juvenile criminals, led to all kinds of favourable treatment for them, with intermediate treatment orders being the classic example. That essentially meant that victims were devalued in the system, and we emphasised the individual criminal, rather than the event—the crime. The victim of a violent crime is more interested in what has been done to them than who has done it.

**James Morris:** My right hon. Friend makes some fair points, but we have to get the balance right in our approach because, as he will recognise, there are a lot of complex drivers.

I am conscious that other Members want to speak and I have taken a number of interventions, so I will draw my remarks to a conclusion. I support the measures in the Bill to tighten up the law enforcement regime for offensive weapons. However, we must reflect on the Government's serious violence strategy, which recognises that the only way we will solve this problem is by taking a multifaceted approach. Law enforcement, in and of itself, is not going to solve the problem. Too many young people are dying in this country, and that is a waste of potential and human life. We have to take the right measures to get to the bottom of why this is happening, and do it soon.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I have now to announce the result of today's deferred Division. In respect of the question relating to healthcare and associated professions, the Ayes were 467 and the Noes were 2, so the Ayes have it.

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

3.25 pm

**Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab):** Today I am going to address the corrosive substances provisions of the Bill and welcome the progress that has been made. Had I realised the direction that the debate was going to take, I would have sought to speak for longer and to discuss the wider concerns that have been raised today. I have been seeking a Westminster Hall debate on those wider issues, and if any other Members wanted to join me in trying to secure a debate in the dying days of this term, I would be delighted.

Last year, there were 85 attacks using corrosive substances in Newham and 468 in the whole of London. In the five years since the start of 2012, the number of acid attacks

in London has increased by some 600%, and my constituency is something of a hotspot. This time last year, the fear in my constituency about acid attacks was palpable. I heard about constituents of all ages and backgrounds who were afraid to leave their homes because the perception was that these acid attacks were random. It was a crisis, and it needed a strong response from Government. I called for that, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), and I am happy to see that many of the specific measures I called for are in the Bill.

Most importantly, the Bill takes a step forward in recognising that corrosives are just as dangerous as knives. They can do just as much harm physically and emotionally, so they should receive the same kind of legal and police response. The introduction of a clear and specific offence of possession of a corrosive substance in public should make the job of the police and the courts easier in catching and prosecuting those who carry acid as a weapon.

The ban on the sale of corrosive products to children is also very welcome. Although I accept the arguments for the age restriction of 18, I join colleagues in asking whether a higher age restriction might be appropriate. I also think that the Bill Committee should look closely at the broader issue of supply, and not just sale. Would it be better to introduce an offence of supplying a child with acid in an unsafe way, not just selling in exchange for money, which I suggested last year? It is important to get this right because some acid attacks, I am told, are revenge, punishments or even initiation rites for junior members of criminally run gangs. If an older man gives acid to a child and tells them to commit an offence or an attack, will the act of giving be covered by an offence in the Bill? Can we prosecute the man who has given the acid to the child as effectively as we would if he had taken money for it? Personally, I think that that is a higher offence than those of unwitting sale or of not taking a salesperson's responsibilities as seriously as the law demands.

Over the past year, I have raised several concerns about online sales of corrosive products. At this time last year, people could buy 96%—I stress, 96%—concentrated sulphuric acid in large bottles from Amazon for about five quid each, with no checks. There is still a requirement for online sellers, like all sellers, to monitor suspicious purchases under the Poisons Act 1972, but the Government have failed to convince me that they can implement or enforce this online, so I welcome the ban on home deliveries of corrosive products. I think that that will take us where we need to be. I hope that it will indirectly ban these sales, because if we cannot make online sales safe, they simply have to be stopped to protect communities.

This Bill is a step forward. It will help to ensure that sellers of these products have face-to-face contact with buyers and can ask them questions. There is really no other way that the law could work. It was always a bit of a joke to suggest that online sellers could monitor suspicious purchases, and I think we got that message across in our debate before Christmas.

I hope this change will make suspicious transaction reporting more workable, but putting a greater emphasis on reporting by retailers only increases the need for proper guidance and for the Home Office to monitor and enforce the legal requirement. Retailers have to understand that there is a real chance that the Government

[Lyn Brown]

will take action against them if they fail. In written questions, I have asked Home Office Ministers whether the Department has a programme of test purchases, but—bless them—I keep being given vague answers to my questions. I would like to hear about this issue from the Minister today, or if she wants, she could write to me about it.

**Sir Edward Davey:** The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. She has done a lot of campaigning on this issue, and I congratulate her on it. The point she is making is absolutely crucial to ensure that the legislation is absolutely effective. Trading standards departments in local authorities up and down the country have been the butt of quite a lot of cuts because councils can get away with it. Unless we support trading standards departments and officers, and back the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, we will not be able to detect such crimes. We will not have the scale of test purchasing that we need to make sure that retailers are acting responsibly.

**Lyn Brown:** I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. As so many others have gone out with the Bill, I suggest that the Government could at the same time look at the minimum wage legislation, because that would give my constituents an awful lot of help.

The Government could have taken a different approach to the Bill. In my speech before Christmas, I argued that several corrosive substances need to be brought under greater control, including ammonia, sodium hydroxide and hydrofluoric acid, as well as sulphuric acid. I am reassured that all those substances have been included in schedule 1 as corrosive products. The list in schedule 1 is new, and does not match the lists in parts 1 to 4 of schedule 1A to the Poisons Act. The Minister could use this Bill or a statutory instrument to move more poisons or chemicals into parts 1 or 2 of schedule 1A to the Poisons Act, meaning that they would require people to have an official licence and photo ID before purchase. That would prevent us having to rely so heavily on retail staff to spot suspicious purchases, and it would restrict these chemicals to the hands of trained professionals who, I presume, will use them safely.

Sulphuric acid has now been moved into part 1 of schedule 1A to the Poisons Act, as I and others have called for. It will require people to have a licence from the end of this week, which is very welcome. My question, however, for the Minister is: why was that decision made for sulphuric acid only, not for the other chemicals I have highlighted? Why not move hydrofluoric acid into part 2 as a regulated poison? It is highly dangerous: as I said in the debate before Christmas, exposure on just 2% of the skin can kill. Why not move ammonia into part 2 as well, given that ammonia was found at 20 out of 28 crime scenes tested by the Met? Perhaps the Department has better evidence about which chemicals are being used in crimes or about those that pose a risk, but if so, I would argue that such a case needs to be made, and made transparently, during the passage of the Bill. That only leaves me to welcome the progress that this Bill represents, although I hope the Minister will agree with me that there are still some serious issues to be addressed.

3.34 pm

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con):** I am grateful to have caught your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, in this important and welcome Second Reading, although I am sorry that I have to be here. I say that because I have had extensive discussions with the Minister on a contentious clause, which proposes the banning of weapons with a muzzle energy of more than 13,600 joules or 10,000 foot-pounds. In this country, there are about a million firearms and shotgun certificate holders, who legally hold about 2 million weapons. They are some of the most law-abiding people in this country; only 0.2% of all recorded crime is committed with legally held firearms. I seek to persuade the House and the Ministers on the Front Bench that the proposal is wholly disproportionate, lacks an evidence base and penalises a group of very law-abiding citizens.

**Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con):** My hon. Friend is right about this. It is clear from listening to a few words from him and to the previous speaker that the Bill needs a lot of work in Committee. Properly evidenced crimes are clearly being missed by the Bill, yet we are taking out legal protection against a group of people who have never done anything wrong and never will, and who have weapons that are absolutely impractical for any sort of criminal activity. This is just badly thought-out legislation.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that, as he has made some of the points I wanted to make in my speech. When he examines the record, he will see that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has, at the Dispatch Box, given me a pledge that he will undertake extensive discussions with any right hon. or hon. colleague, or any stakeholder in this matter, who wishes to involve themselves in those discussions to see whether we can find a more sensible way forward between now and Committee.

**Bill Wiggin:** I am sorry if I was too harsh.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend is not too harsh. I am simply saying to him that there is concern among Government Members, and it is worthy of further discussion.

**Sir Edward Davey:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that some groups representing disabled shooters are concerned that this legislation may particularly affect them, although the Government's equality statement says that it does not? Does he have a view on that matter?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I do. Of course we want shooting to be used by every group in society; no group should in any way be excluded. I was not intending to talk about bump stocks and the VZ58 MARS—manually actuated release system—proposals in the Bill. I know that representations have been made that those semi-automatic additions to rifles help disabled groups, but I take the view, having received representations from the groups I represent, that such adaptations of otherwise bolt-action single-shot rifles, converting them into, in effect, semi-automatic rifles should be banned. After the horrific shootings in the United States, even President Trump was minded to say that they should be banned.

On that basis, I think Ministers are doing the right thing, although I accept that it might well disadvantage some disabled people. We have to find other ways of helping those groups, perhaps by adapting rifles or the places where these people shoot.

I am chairman of the all-party group on shooting and conservation, and I work closely with all the professional shooting bodies, including the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Countryside Alliance and the British Shooting Sports Council. They have made lots of very professional representations to the Minister on this subject. I have also been working closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly), who represents the BSSC but could not be here for our debate because, unfortunately, he has had to attend a family funeral today. We are seeking to persuade the Minister to consider modifying the proposals.

In clause 28(2), the Government propose to ban all weapons that have a muzzle energy greater than 13,600 joules. The Bill would put them into section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968—in other words, it would make them a prohibited weapon. There are about 200 of those weapons—a small number—and just over 200 people, probably, have a licence to use them. I will discuss where the weapons should be stored, but I want to give the House a sense of the sort of people who are disadvantaged by the Bill by quoting paragraph 7 of the British Shooting Sports Council brief:

“In fact, the Fifty Calibre Shooters Association...which is dedicated to target shooting with this calibre has its origins in the early 1980s in the USA and has over 2,500 members internationally. It is affiliated with .50 calibre target rifle shooting groups in Australia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom and, in addition to regular competitions, hosts the annual World Championship in which UK FCSEA target shooters compete. The UK FCSEA is a Home Office Approved Club, has existed as a well-respected target shooting club since 1991 and has grown to a membership of over 400.”

These are the sorts of people whom we are disadvantaging. As I have already said, and as I stress again to the Minister, these are some of the most law-abiding people in the country.

**Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con):** Is my hon. Friend aware that the Government's latest impact assessment for the Bill suggests that the measure could cost them up to £6 million—not only in compensation for loss of weapons, but through the loss of revenue at Government Ministry of Defence rifle ranges?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that this is going to be expensive. Nobody would mind the expense if it was rooted in public safety—that is beyond question—but, as I will seek to explain in a minute, I do not think that it is.

In case anybody gets the impression that I am a mad rifle-wielding individual, I should say that, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on shooting and conservation, I have been working closely on making the licensing of firearms and shotguns more effective. There is a serious health and safety issue at the moment because some doctors are refusing to co-operate with the police in the granting of certificates. That is completely unacceptable: the Firearms Act 1968 is predicated on the basis that somebody can be licensed to have a shotgun or firearm only if they are a fit and proper person. If they have certain medical conditions, they

should not hold a shotgun or firearms certificate. I believe, at this moment, that people out there have firearms certificates who should not have.

**Bill Wiggin:** I think my hon. Friend means mental health conditions, not medical conditions. Does he agree that, happily, because of our stringent licensing system, evil terrorists are not committing crimes using legally held guns?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend has pulled me up: words are important in this place. What I meant to say was medical conditions which might include a mental health condition—but there are medical conditions that might mean that someone was not granted a shotgun or firearms certificate.

I want to move on to the .50 calibre weapons themselves, and why they are not likely to be used in a crime—and never have been, as far as we know.

**Simon Hoare:** A moment ago, my hon. Friend said he did not want to be caricatured, and that is absolutely right. It is important for everybody to understand that this is not a rampant, American, NRA-type debate, but one based on evidence, fact, practical experience and trying to make good law.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend makes a really potent and timely point; I was about to demonstrate why these weapons have never been implicated in any crime. There was one incident when one was stolen; the barrel was chopped down but the gun was quickly recovered and never implicated in a crime. There has been only one other incident: more than 20 years ago, a .50 calibre weapon was stolen in Northern Ireland and used in the troubles and then, again, recovered.

Instances of such weapons being likely to fall into the wrong hands are incredibly rare. Even if they did, they are most unlikely ever to be used by a criminal, as I shall try to persuade the House. They are as long as the span of my arms and incredibly heavy and bulky. They demand a great deal of effort between shots. They are simply not the criminal's weapon of choice. The weapon of choice of a criminal is likely to be something gained from the dark web or the underground. It is likely to be a sawn-off shotgun, or a revolver or pistol of some sort. These really heavy, clunky weapons are simply not the weapon of choice of the criminal. In the one instance I suspect my hon. Friend the Minister will cite in her summing up, a criminal stole it, realised what they had got hold of and that it was not suitable to be used in a crime, and chucked it over a hedge.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** My hon. Friend uses the phrase “weapon of choice” among criminals. Is it not an irony that the criminals' weapons of choice are already banned and are held illegally?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right and it is very sad, when people gain pleasure from using these rifles, that the Government want to effectively ban them. The muzzle energy will effectively mean a ban on the .5 calibre. The only reason the Government are banning them is that they happen to be one of the largest calibres. The police and the other authorities are saying that because they are so large they must be

[*Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown*]

dangerous. I have to tell the House that any rifle is dangerous in the wrong hands and used in the wrong way. A .22, the very smallest rifle, is lethal at over a mile if it is fired straight at somebody. All rifles need to be handled with great care and held in very secure conditions.

In summing up, the Government will, I think, cite some evidence as to why these rifles need to be banned. They will cite the one that was stolen and chucked over the hedge with the barrel chopped off, they will cite the fact that one was used in the troubles in Northern Ireland, and they will cite the fact that more high-powered weapons are being seized by customs at our borders. But this has nothing to do with .5 calibre weapons. It has everything to do with illegal weapons, the sort of weapons of choice that, sadly, the criminal and the terrorist will use, but not these particular weapons.

**Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend not agree that the three examples he cites are actually applicable to pretty much any weapon, and that, if we concede on that point, perfectly legitimate rifles and shotguns would be at risk of being removed from society all together?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** That is precisely the point I am making. This whole thing would set a precedent: .5 weapons today, then .60—where do we go next? Just because people think they might get into the wrong hands and be used by the wrong people. That is the wrong way to govern. We should not prohibit things unless there is really good evidence for doing so.

I have been having discussions with Ministers. I have said that instead of banning these weapons, as there are so few of them and they are able to be fired legally at so few ranges by so few people, why not toughen up the rules on storage to make it absolutely impossible for them ever to be stolen? If they had to be stored in an armoury, at a gun club by arrangement with the police or in a military storage by arrangement with the military, storage would have to be approved by the police. There could be alarms and CCTV in the storage and weapons would not be licensed unless the police approved places of secure storage. That would be a much more effective and useful way of going forward if we want to stop weapons falling into the wrong hands, and would make it much safer for us all.

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I agree with my hon. Friend 100% on the point he is making. One of the ranges used is in my constituency. In a bizarre way, I would say that when the club is shooting there it is one of the safest places to be, because people are trained and know what they are doing. We should be looking at the security and storage element, not banning these weapons.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to look at this again. The proposals in the Bill are disproportionate. They are unworkable, because they are very easy to get around. They target some of the most law-abiding people in the country and they will not make this country any safer, because the criminal will use a different weapon of choice.

3.49 pm

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I want to express rather more support for the Bill than the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) did, but I will comment just on the elements that deal with corrosive substances. I particularly welcome clause 5, as others have, which creates the new offence of having a corrosive substance in a public place.

A year ago on 21 June, in our borough of Newham, Jameel Muhkhtar and his cousin, Resham Khan, were sprayed with acid while they were sitting in a car on the way to a party celebrating her 21st birthday. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) said in her excellent speech, after that event there was a wave of revulsion and fear across the borough. Mr Speaker was good enough to grant an Adjournment debate on 17 July, the intention of which was to bring forward proposals in response to that wave of fear. However, by the time we got to that debate, there had been the series of incidents on 13 July, when there were six acid attacks from the back of a moped in the space of 90 minutes across Hackney and Islington, and there was a lot of public interest in this whole issue. One of the two perpetrators involved in the attacks in Hackney and Islington was, we know now, aged 16 at the time, and he pleaded guilty to carrying them out.

In that Adjournment debate, at which my hon. Friend was present, we called for two specific changes to the law. The first was that the purchase of sulphuric acid should require a licence, and, as she pointed out, that has been done through a statutory instrument that will take effect from Sunday. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), in opening this debate for the Opposition, argued that there should be a review of the list of substances in that category under the explosive precursor regulations that require a licence to be purchased. I agree with her and I am very pleased that sulphuric acid has been added to that list, but we need to look at what else should be there as well.

The second change that we called for was that carrying acid should be an offence, just as carrying a knife is, and I am very pleased that that is included in clause 5. I thank the Minister for successfully delivering that change. She and I would probably both have been pleased had the legislation been introduced a bit faster, but I am very pleased that it is before the House today. I am also grateful to her for keeping me and other Members informed about the progress in working up the legislation.

I have some detailed questions, however. Clause 1 bans the sale of corrosive products to persons under 18. As we have been told, the products are listed in schedule 1. Would it not be better to do that in regulations rather than having a schedule to the Bill, so that the list can be added to or amended? It is unlikely that that list and the particular concentrations that are set out in the schedule will be the last word. I am interested to know how the particular list of concentrations was come up with, for example. It looks a bit arbitrary. There may be some reason for choosing those concentrations, and if so I would like to know what it is. This looks like the kind of thing we sometimes chide Ministers for wanting to put in regulations, but in this case I think there could be a good case for doing it through regulations so that it can be changed at a later date. It seems a bit odd that as things stand, any change to the list of substances or concentrations would require another

Act of Parliament, so I wonder why it has been done in that way and whether it ought to be done in regulations instead.

Clause 5 bans having corrosive substances—not corrosive products—in a public place and it tells us that a corrosive substance is a substance capable of harming human skin by corrosion. I presume that means that it covers substances not on the list in schedule 1. It seems a bit odd to have two different definitions of “corrosive substance” in two different parts of the Bill, one in schedule 1 and one defined as causing corrosive harm to human skin. Clause 5 does not refer to schedule 1. Does the Minister expect the police in practice to use schedule 1 to work out which products are covered by clause 5, or does she expect them to come up with a different list? It seems a little untidy to have two definitions.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham and others, I think it would be better to ban sales to under-21s, rather than under-18s. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley rightly suggested that the current restrictions, which the Bills extends, on knives in schools and further education colleges ought to apply to corrosive substances. What we already do for knives should apply as well to acid. I would hope that that extension could be made.

Acid Survivors Trust International has rightly made the case that more needs to be done to address the impact of acid attacks, which, as we all recognise, can be horrifying. The number of attacks in London nearly trebled between 2014 and 2017. I tabled a series of parliamentary questions last month to try to understand the economic impact of acid attacks—the cost to the police, the cost to the health service and the cost of imprisoning people who carry them out—and all received the answer: Ministers do not know what the impacts are. The Home Office does not collect national statistics on acid attacks. I think it should. We ought to make that addition to the statistics collected. In April, the Department asked the National Police Chiefs’ Council to undertake a data-collection exercise on acid attacks. Will the Minister tell us what came out of that exercise and whether she will consider adding these figures to those routinely collected by her Department? We should have a more systematic way of knowing the scale of this crime.

I pay tribute to Javed Hussain, whom I believe the Minister has met. He is a moped delivery driver in London who was the victim of an acid attack and subsequently organised other drivers into what he calls the Workers Union London. He argues, correctly I think, that changes to the law, while very welcome—and I certainly welcome what is proposed in the Bill—will not solve the problem on their own. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley made this point powerfully. As Javed Hussain points out, the scale of police cuts in London has made the problem significantly worse. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner herself has acknowledged that the cuts to police numbers have undoubtedly contributed to the surge in violent crime, and those cuts need to be reversed. Javed Hussain also makes the point that we are nowhere near addressing the scale of the physical and psychological damage suffered by acid attack victims and their families, and that the children of victims need help, too, yet there is nothing available for them at the moment.

There is a correlation between gang membership and the use of acid as a weapon, as others have suggested. The Government’s efforts to step up their response to gangs will be crucial. I welcome the establishment of the centre in London to deal with the county lines issue around the country.

I welcome the Bill and congratulate the Minister, but I think that, alongside the Bill, an enormous amount more needs to be done.

4 pm

**Julia Lopez** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I am glad to follow the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), who I know has very personal experience of these issues.

As a London MP, I welcome the Bill as a vital tool in the fight against the kinds of violent crime that are sadly increasing across the capital. While overall crime continues to fall, knife crime, gun crime and homicide are unfortunately on the rise, and we are seeing lives torn apart by utterly senseless violence, as the age profile of both victims and perpetrators shifts lower. Although some of that increase can be attributed to improvements in police recording, changes in the illegal drugs trade seem to be driving the other part of the trend. Criminal gangs have been adapting their business model to exploit previously untapped markets beyond inner London, using vulnerable young people as distributors, and upping their violence and intimidation to break into new territory. Meanwhile, there was a record number of acid attacks in London last year. I therefore welcome the fact that the Bill bans the sale of the most dangerous corrosive products to under-18s, and criminalises the possession of corrosive substances in a public place.

As the fear of crime rises in tandem with those trends, too many young people are choosing to arm themselves, which is why the Bill introduces tough new restrictions on the online sales of knives. It will also become illegal to possess certain offensive weapons in private, including zombie knives and knuckle-dusters. To assist prosecutions, clause 26 amends the legal test regarding threats made with an illegal weapon.

As many Members have pointed out, the Bill is not a panacea, and the Government recognise that. Legislation and policing must be complemented by cross-agency working that involves schools, social services and communities. Such a partnership lies at the heart of the Government’s serious violence strategy, whereby Home Office funding will knit together a cohesive, cross-departmental approach to violent crime. I hope that that approach will include consideration of the worrying rise in school exclusions. Criminals are feeding on vulnerable young people who are falling out of the system. With the number of secondary permanent exclusions climbing for the fourth consecutive year, too many students are being taught in pupil referral units. We need new core schools to sit between mainstream schools and those units, working hand in glove with social services to support vulnerable pupils.

I am also concerned about the fact that local authorities are overstretched owing to outdated assumptions about need. My borough of Havering is dealing with the fastest-growing number of children of any London authority. In fulfilling statutory duties towards vulnerable youngsters, the council is left with little cash proactively

[*Julia Lopez*]

to address other problems affecting that group and their families, such as addiction. Meanwhile, the pressures on social workers are leading to additional demand on police. One of my local officers says that he is now being called more regularly to tackle matters that are best handled by trained social workers.

The Mayor of London's first reaction to rising violence on his watch seems always to be to blame the Government for his funding settlement, but money cannot be a substitute for strategy. The Mayor must turn urgently to a review of performance, operations and tactics, and the building of better collaborative partnerships across London to mimic the success of our mayoral team in halving teen knife deaths between 2008 and 2011 at a time of budgetary constraint. None the less, I am not so naive as to discount resourcing as a problem. More money has been provided by the Home Office for counter-terrorism duties, and the Mayor is now able to increase his precept substantially. There are more efficiencies to be found from the new technologies that are finally being deployed. The Government must, however, acknowledge that the demand on police in London is increasing rapidly.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): As my hon. Friend rightly notes, resourcing is an issue, but it is equally important to ensure that we get enough bang for our buck. In that context, does she agree that putting more police officers on bikes, which enables them to be visible but also to cover a great deal of ground—particularly in a constituency that is flat, such as Cheltenham—is basically a good idea?

**Julia Lopez:** That does indeed sound like, basically, a good idea. I think everyone agrees that police visibility is vital to maintaining the trust of the community, and to the sharing of intelligence.

The variety of issues that the police are being asked to tackle is becoming ever broader, and rapid demographic and technological changes are spreading the challenges across more boroughs. To put it simply, we need more resources, whether that means officers on the ground or analysts who can track and understand trends. My policing team has said that one of the big problems across the Met is the reduction in the number of analysts at Scotland Yard who can spot where crimes are happening and deploy resources accordingly.

We must also give officers the confidence that they will be backed in using the powers available to them. I have raised these issues at a high level within Government and encourage the Met and Home Office together to take a firm grip and disrupt the criminal gang networks relentlessly. Recent media reports suggest that the takeover of the crack cocaine market by Albanian mafia is partly responsible for a new wave of violence, so how are we working with authorities in Albania and other countries to ensure the swift deportation of violent criminals from these shores?

On a parochial level, I am concerned that the Mayor's policing assumptions are not keeping up with the change under way in London's suburbs. It is not surprising that the fear of crime in my constituency is high, even if violent crime levels are comparatively low. In neighbouring Romford, where many teenagers from my constituency shop and socialise, we saw at the weekend the needless

stabbing to death of a 15-year-old schoolboy, and knives have recently been wielded openly in the local shopping centre.

The trust of a community in the responsiveness of police is vital to ensuring local intelligence is shared and crime kept low. That trust is being lost due to problems in reporting, particularly through the 101 service. The initial problems in police response times following the Mayor's tri-borough policing restructure seemed to have been resolved, but the community distrust was then compounded by the planned closure of Hornchurch police station.

Without that physical presence, residents are understandably concerned that town centres in my constituency will be neglected so as to tackle the growing problems in Romford, Barking, East Ham and elsewhere. In the meantime, our borough is attempting to purchase the police station from the Mayor and provide community space for police elsewhere, and the Mayor ought to be encouraging more of this kind of community partnership work.

Finally, I offered to raise concerns put to me by constituents about the provisions in the Bill on rifles, as eloquently expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown). One resident, a retired police officer and someone who represented our country in shooting, is concerned that the prohibition of certain firearms is a tokenistic response disproportionate to the risk. Other constituents advise that no legally owned rifle of the types this Bill prohibits has ever been used in criminal activity despite being used by target shooters for many decades. They are unconvinced by the Home Office's evidential base for this move and feel therefore that this proposed legislation amounts to an abuse of process. I hope some of these issues will be ironed out in Committee.

Those concerns aside, however, I broadly welcome the Bill in providing us with another tool to tackle violent crime. But we must all be mindful not ever to see legislation as a cure-all. This urgent task requires the right laws, the right policing tactics, the right resource, the right punishment and the right partnership work to drive this scourge from our communities.

4.7 pm

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): I begin by thanking the Minister for crime, safeguarding and vulnerability for taking time out of a very busy diary to meet me recently to discuss the Bill in greater detail. The opportunity to raise some matters of specific concern to my constituents was much appreciated.

I, along with Plaid Cymru, welcome the Bill and support the Government's desire to control the purchase and possession of offensive weapons by those who, frankly, have no legitimate reason to have them. The Minister will be aware, however, of some of my concerns, particularly about the unintended consequences this legislation might have for legitimate uses of some knives and firearms by responsible citizens, and I shall focus my remarks on those points.

Like the Minister, I represent a rural constituency in which many small businesses and tradesmen use knives to carry out their professions. Some of them have contacted me recently to express their concerns about the impact that these new restrictions, particularly on the online sale of some knives, might have on them.

In a rural constituency such as Ceredigion, it is often not practical, and certainly not always easy, for people to travel to a designated location to verify their identity, as opposed to receiving a delivery of tools at a home address, for example. This would pose specific difficulties for some smaller businesses as well.

It is important that, in combating knife crime, legislation targets specific blades and offenders, and that its impact on responsible users is mitigated as much as possible, be they woodsmen and farmers, Scout group leaders and outdoor educators, chefs or even those participating in historical re-enactments, all of whom have contacted me to express concerns. I would therefore be grateful if the Minister elaborated on how the Bill will mitigate the impact of these changes on responsible users, to provide reassurance that it will target the unjustifiable use of offensive blades, but still allow others to be used responsibly for justifiable work or leisure-related purposes.

I also want to echo some of the arguments made about the need to take a proportionate approach to changes to firearms regulations. It is appropriate that those who hold firearms certificates are rigorously assessed by the police and subjected to medical assessments, background checks and continuous monitoring. Firearms of any calibre and description are dangerous if they fall into the wrong hands. Concerns have already been expressed—I will not go into them again in too much detail—that some of the proposed changes, including those to muzzle velocity regulations, will unfairly impact legitimate law-abiding firearms holders such as target shooters without achieving greater public safety or reducing gun crime. Will the Minister reconsider those concerns in Committee and provide greater detail on the justification for those changes?

**Alex Chalk:** I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has, like me, received representations from legitimate sportspeople saying that they would be open to considering further proposals such as additional storage security measures to allay any lingering concerns that may remain.

**Ben Lake:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I have indeed received many representations from responsible sportsmen, and from target shooters in particular, who are very open to looking again at the conditions connected to the licensing arrangements, particularly with regard to the storage of firearms. It would be both proportionate and reasonable to pursue the matter further in Committee.

**Chris Davies** *rose*—

**Ben Lake:** I give way to my hon. Friend and neighbour.

**Chris Davies:** I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for giving way. As well as being neighbours, we also share a police force. Does he agree that if the extra restrictions were put in, our police force, and indeed all the police forces around the country, would easily manage to ensure that they were enforced?

**Ben Lake:** I concur wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. I am aware that Dyfed-Powys police already enforce the licensing arrangements thoroughly. It would be a reasonable and logical step to add some additional requirements with regard to the security of storage, and I am sure that the police will be fully able to ensure that the law is complied with. It is incumbent on us to ensure

that any changes to the regulations are effective in reducing gun crime while not punishing responsible firearms certificate holders unnecessarily. The aim must be to enhance public safety by reducing gun crime, so it is important that any assessments suggesting that such changes will realise that aim should be published in full detail for scrutiny.

I would like to conclude by referring to the horrific incidents we have seen all too often in recent years that have made the corrosive substances aspect of the Bill so vital. The rise in the number of instances in which acids or corrosive products have been weaponised is frankly frightening. The availability of those products has made them a weapon of choice for those of wicked intent, with devastating consequences. It saddens me that, in the 21st century, we find ourselves having to discuss ways to prevent such acts of barbarity and of stopping individuals using otherwise legitimate products to inflict devastating harm on others, but we are where we are. It is entirely appropriate—and indeed, incumbent on the Government—to legislate to try to prevent such hideous crimes from taking place.

I have asked for assurances from the Government on the proportionality of the proposed measures on knives and firearms, but let me be clear that I welcome their efforts to control the number of knives, firearms and corrosive substances on our streets. There is absolutely no reason for an individual to have a zombie knife, a flick-knife or a knuckleduster, or for them to carry acid on our streets. Those items have no purpose other than to inflict as much damage as possible, and I therefore welcome the Bill's move to tighten the law in relation to their possession.

More must be done to tackle the root causes of such crimes, with greater support being given to those who feel the need to carry a weapon in the first place, and to tackle the decline in police numbers. Those matters are perhaps beyond the scope of the Bill, but we as legislators have a duty to consider them, and I hope that the Government give the House that opportunity in the near future.

4.14 pm

**Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake). I agree with him wholeheartedly that it is sad that we are debating these issues and that the Government have had to introduce the Bill. It should not be necessary—people should not throw acid in people's faces, which has a life-changing impact, and they should not use knives on our streets.

However, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, we are where we are. This is a hugely important Bill because the scourge of knife and acid crime touches not only a number of constituencies within London and our inner cities, but all our constituencies up and down the country. I am sorry to say that its intensity is growing outside the major cities, and it is finding its way into towns such as mine and rural communities. It devastates communities, including mine, where we have had horrific knife attacks. I agree that one victim of an acid or knife attack is one too many. The tragedy is that, in many cases, young people's lives are taken at an early age when they have so much promise ahead of them, which devastates not only the families but the wider community.

[Will Quince]

We know that the victims and perpetrators of such offences are often from outside the towns in which those offences are committed. I have referenced one incident in the House previously. There were six knife attacks in Colchester in one evening, and in all six cases, the victims and perpetrators were from outside Colchester—they came from London. This is not just a city issue anymore. County lines are bought and sold like franchises. The perpetrators use children—they know that they are less likely to be stopped and searched on the train or other public transport—to carry drugs, bringing with them fear, intimidation and violence to towns up and down the country. As I said, in the case I mentioned, the victims and perpetrators were all from London. There is an increase in county lines activity and the barbaric activity known as cuckooing. Much of this is, sadly, drug-related.

I welcome the Government's serious crime strategy and the £40 million that comes with it. I was pleased to speak in the debate just a few weeks ago about that very subject. I have my own views about what we need to do to tackle serious crime, and especially on prevention and diversion. The Government's strategy includes a number of measures that I wholeheartedly support but, as the Minister knows, because we have had this conversation, the question is how we treat children who have been involved in county lines operations. In many cases we are talking about 12 to 15-year-olds who are groomed by drug gangs in a similar way to how sexual predators groom young people. It can start with the purchase of trainers or a financial gift of some description, or it can start with violence and intimidation of either the young person or a family member. Do we treat those children like criminals, bearing in mind their life chances from that moment on, or do we treat them like the victims they are, and put them back on the right track to a fulfilling life in which they contribute fully to society?

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that children's criminal records should not haunt them for the rest of their lives and that our system should wipe the slate clean at a certain point?

**Will Quince:** I broadly agree with my right hon. Friend. When we criminalise a child at a young age, the problem is that their life chances are impaired to such an extent that a life continuing along the route of criminality is sadly almost inevitable. We should break that cycle when we have the opportunity to intervene—such opportunities are often rare—and ensure that we put them back on the right path. One way to do that is to ensure that a criminal record does not stay with a child forever. For example, someone might commit an offence at a young age after they have been groomed or forced into that action due to violence and intimidation. They could then completely turn their lives around and think, 10 years later, "I want to contribute by becoming a police officer and serving my community." Currently—I stand to be corrected by the Minister—that would not be possible, because their criminal record continues. I wholeheartedly agree with my right hon. Friend.

I welcome the Bill and will support its Second Reading. It has huge merits but, as a number of right hon. and hon. Members have said, it is not without issue. By its

nature, it is reactive legislation that deals with weapons that gangs and criminals have moved on to. Some of those weapons—knives and corrosives—can probably never truly be banned, as we all know that they are available in households across the country. I could probably find several in my kitchen. We need to ensure that we have a multifaceted approach to tackling this issue, and the serious violence strategy has a significant role to play.

First, we need to make sure that our legislation gives the police the powers they need to deal with offenders, which is one thing that the Bill does. Secondly, we need to make sure that, when we intervene, we do so as early as possible. We need to turn children away from gangs and, indeed, when they are the victims of gangs or grooming, we need to give them the protection and support they need.

As I have said previously in the Chamber, we need education in schools to ensure that children know the dangers of carrying a weapon. There are some fantastic charities across the country—many have been set up by parents who have lost a child to knife crime—that go into schools to educate children about the danger of carrying knives. The charities teach children that they are far more likely to be the victim of a knife attack if they carry a knife themselves, and they show them in a graphic way the devastation caused by a knife attack. They show the awful wounds, and they also show what it feels like to be a family member whose child is in hospital or, even worse, has been fatally wounded or murdered.

Thirdly, judges need a full range of sentencing powers so that a person who is repeatedly caught carrying a knife, or who is caught harming an individual, can be given a custodial sentence. I agree with Members who have said that we need to come down very hard on those who are repeatedly caught carrying a knife or weapon, and on those who harm another individual, but there need to be other solutions, such as educational and non-custodial approaches, so that we do not fill our prisons with young people who have lost their future.

At the moment, an individual who is caught carrying a knife may get just a caution. In my view, they should also be sent on a weapons awareness course. A person who is caught speeding, for example—I am not conflating carrying a knife and speeding but, to some extent, it is a useful comparison—has the option of paying a fine or going on a course. It should be mandatory that a person who is given a caution for any kind of weapon-related offence is sent on a course. They should have to see the devastation caused by such weapons, which hopefully would go some way towards breaking their attitude towards carrying a weapon and knife crime. That would not work for everyone, but for some individuals, especially those who are particularly young and have made a mistake—for many first-time offenders it will be just a mistake—it might just break the cycle, and at very small cost. Such courses are, in many cases, run by charities across the country.

Fourthly, we need to identify and address the root causes of this criminality. Why do people carry weapons? How has our society got to this position? It could be social breakdown, regional inequality, family breakdown, absent father figures or a lack of male role models. It could be school exclusion, which has been mentioned, or social isolation—gang culture can provide a sense of

belonging. It could be county line activity or prostitution. It could actually be education and the messaging we send out about drugs and drug use.

I find it bizarre that we have middle-class people in this country who drive around in their electric vehicles, drinking their Rainforest Alliance coffee and eating their Fairtrade chocolate, but who have no qualms whatsoever about going out at the weekend and having a few lines of coke, because that does not harm anyone, does it? If only those people saw the devastation that that causes both in the country where the cocaine is sourced from and through the county line activity in this country that takes the drugs from the point of entry to the point at which they are sold. If only they saw, in so many cases, the children whose lives have been devastated as a result. We need to send a clear message that drug taking is not acceptable and that, through the damage it does, it is not a victimless crime.

**Mr John Hayes:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent point that deserves amplification. The gated-lived, middle-class liberals who take drugs have little or no care because they have little or no contact with the kind of people he describes. It is the people on the frontline who suffer, and they deserve to be treated as a priority.

**Will Quince:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. It is important to note, though, that although in the past people have thought, “This isn’t a problem for us—this isn’t something that our children would be involved in,” the reality is that it is now quite the opposite. These grooming gangs are looking for people who are not stereotypical. They are looking for children who are particularly vulnerable, and that is not just children from socially deprived backgrounds or from council housing estates—the people one would perhaps automatically associate with being easy prey for some of these grooming gangs—but the young people who are easiest to groom and are less likely to be stopped and searched by a police officer. The enemy is at the gate, and to think that our own children and the children of middle-class families are not as affected as anybody else is a myth. It is a dangerous assumption not to think that every single part of our society and every town in our country is affected, and even rural areas. We should absolutely send out the message loud and clear that this affects everybody’s children, not just somebody else’s.

On root causes, we need to take a much tougher stance on antisocial behaviour. If we do not take a tougher stance on very low-level crime, it will be easier for people to think that other crimes are acceptable. A policing focus on drugs would be particularly helpful. To tackle the issues, we really need to understand the root causes. The strategy goes some way towards achieving that, but there is more work to do.

Let me turn to the specifics of the Bill. There is no reason whatsoever for under-18s to be able to buy these weapons, nor for them to carry them in public, so I very much welcome the Government’s position. There is also no reason to possess certain weapons in private properties. There is no justification for having zombie knives, knuckle dusters and death stars, even in private possession.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Successive Governments have failed to tackle the knife culture in this country, so in a way this is not really a political thing.

We have had instances in Coventry, going back around 20-odd years, of people giving evidence in court and the individual being given a sentence, but then visiting them as a punishment. That is one part of the whole argument about witness protection schemes.

**Will Quince:** The hon. Gentleman raises a good point. There is no easy answer to this issue; if there was, successive Governments would have addressed it. That was why I was making the point that to really address knife crime and why people carry weapons, we need to understand the root causes and then put in place interventions at numerous points on the journey towards criminality. Even when someone has entered criminality, we should intervene at the earliest possible opportunity to try to break the cycle and turn someone’s life around.

On the online sale of weapons, I very much welcome the banning of the delivery of knives and corrosives brought online, and especially the fact that they will no longer be deliverable to residential addresses. I agree with the position in the Bill: there is no reason why such items cannot be purchased in person. The Bill goes some way to addressing the move towards online purchases, but I have a couple of questions for the Minister. Have we looked into age verification on delivery, which is an option that already exists for a number of products? I appreciate that there are some flaws with that approach, but I think there is something in it to be teased out in Committee. Have we assessed the possibility of individuals getting these weapons delivered to workplaces instead? So many people have even private parcels delivered to their workplaces, so we must ensure that there is no loophole for people to purchase corrosives or knives using that route.

On retailers, have we done any liaison with retailers on theft? If we are to make knives more difficult to come across—I refer back to what I said about these items being in most of our kitchens up and down the country—what work has been done on theft? I can walk into any Sainsbury’s or Tesco store—other supermarkets are, of course, available—and notice that in the kitchen aisle it is only the high-value knives that have any kind of security tag. Some of the very sharp, low-priced knives are just there on the shelves for anybody to pick up. I should also point out that they are not even always above the height that children can reach, which is perhaps another point that needs to be considered. I am not sure whether we need to go as far as having all knives behind a counter so we have to request one, as we do with cigarettes. Perhaps we should look at some kind of security tagging of knives, especially sharp knives. I do not know whether we have looked at having cabinets in shops. I am conscious that that is not the panacea; it will not fix the issue, but it might go some way towards making it harder for individuals to get hold of a knife.

As has been said by many hon. Members, constituents have raised firearms as an issue. Although I represent a wholly urban constituency, I have a number of people who are interested in firearms for sporting purposes. I have some sympathy with the Government’s view on the banning of .50 calibre rifles for civilian ownership. These are very high-powered rifles that can punch through armour. I know that they have been banned in California under Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Inevitably,

[Will Quince]

with any such policy, we must make sure that it is evidence based. I understand that there is a case of one of these weapons being stolen, but it was recovered very quickly by the police. We need to make sure that our policy is evidence based. We are talking about a very small number of these weapons. As far as I understand it, we do not have any evidence of these weapons having been used in crimes.

**Mark Garnier** (Wyre Forest) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a very good point. As for what the Government have tried to achieve, this Bill is, in every other respect, almost a perfect Bill. However, what they run the risk of doing with a ban on .50 calibre rifles is demonising people in the community who are incredibly law abiding. What we do not want to do is to fall into the trap, which we did with the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the handgun ban, of creating bad law when, actually, this Bill in every other respect is very good law.

**Will Quince:** I agree with my hon. Friend. I could understand it if there was a compelling case that these particular weapons had been used in extensive criminality, or indeed if there was a very strong evidence-based case against them because there was a threat that they would be used in some form of criminality. My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) put it very well: there are a very small number of individuals who use these weapons. If the Government believe that there is case to do something, then absolutely, yes, let us do so. Let us look at the security of these firearms. Let us perhaps look, in extremis, at allowing them to be kept only at ranges, and secured with equipment that is not usually found domestically. However, there is concern among the sporting firearms fraternity that this might be the thin end of the wedge and that it would lead to further such banning of weapons.

All I am saying to the Minister is: can we take a look at this matter in Committee to make sure that any approach that we take is indeed evidence based? That also goes for the case in relation to manually actuated release system rifles. I agree with the Government's fundamental position that these are, in theory, dangerous weapons, but I also appreciate the views of those constituents who have contacted me who have a disability. One in particular has contacted me and said that this is the only weapon that he can fire, and the measure would mean that he could not partake in his sport. We need to consider whether we argue for an exemption, whether we tighten up the measures to ensure that these rifles are more secure than most other firearms have to be, or indeed whether they have to be kept at a registered range. I hope that the Minister will take that away and look at it, along with a number of points that have been made by colleagues, in Committee. Let me reiterate the point that any change that we make must absolutely be evidence based.

To conclude, this is a good Bill. Its intentions are indeed very good and sound, but there is work to do in Committee, and there is certainly further work to do on the serious crime strategy. I just hope that we can be pragmatic and look at any and all measures in the future that will go some way towards addressing the scourge that is knife crime—or indeed any crime involving weapons of this nature.

4.33 pm

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I broadly welcome this legislation to crack down on crimes involving knives, firearms and corrosives. Valid concerns have been raised in this debate, and I urge Ministers to think carefully about whether changes can be made to the Bill to reflect some of them.

Although overall levels of crime have fallen using the established measurements, the recent uplift in serious violent crime is hugely worrying to me and everyone else in the House, particularly in our capital city, where my constituency is located. Even my constituency of Chipping Barnet has not been immune from this problem, with a fatal shooting in Cockfosters in February. The Bill will assist the fight against this type of brutal crime.

At the summit held in April, which was attended by the Home Secretary, the Mayor of London and a broad range of elected representatives across London from different parties, there was widespread agreement on the need for a robust policing and criminal justice response, and this legislation will assist on that score, because it will help to keep dangerous weapons off our streets. I attended the summit, where we also agreed that we needed to go beyond a policing and justice response to tackle this problem. We agreed that a renewed focus was needed on early intervention to try to prevent young people from becoming involved in gangs. I welcome the fact that many Members have made similar points this afternoon, and that this point is a key part of the Government's serious violence strategy. I very much hope that the early intervention youth fund, which is part of the Government's strategy, can play a valuable role in bringing to an end this totally unacceptable spike upwards in the murder rate—including, sadly, crimes involving the sorts of offensive weapons targeted in the Bill.

It is important to deliver on the commitments in the Government's strategy on county lines, which, as others have said, are bringing the blight of drug-related serious violence to many towns, cities and, indeed, rural areas across the country. In London we need the Government, the Mayor, the police, and local groups and communities to work together to combat this new menace to children and young people. I therefore welcome the commitment in the Government's strategy to support local groups and partnerships, which need to be at the heart of an effective response to these problems.

We should be in no doubt that it is possible to bring down levels of this type of serious violent crime because that has been done before in this city. In the closing years of Ken Livingstone's mayoralty, there was a similar jump in the murder rate, but this was brought down by determined action by his successor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), and his deputy Mayor for policing, Stephen Greenhalgh. I appeal to the Government and the current Mayor to learn from what the former Mayor was able to achieve. In particular, the current Mayor needs to hold the police to account regarding their delivery of the objectives that he sets them in this important area.

The role of the Mayor in holding the police to account is an important part of an effective criminal justice response to serious crime. I also believe that the Mayor should reconsider his decision to close Barnet police station. The station came under threat in 2012,

but I was one of a number of people who helped to persuade the previous Mayor to keep it open, so it was saved then, but its closure by the current Mayor has caused considerable anxiety.

I accept that front-desk services in police stations are not as heavily used as they once were, and that there are now many different ways in which to report crimes to the police. This issue is not just about front desk closures. Once the Mayor's closure plans go ahead in full, the police in Barnet will be left with no base at all in my constituency of Chipping Barnet. I am concerned that a visible police presence in my constituency will inevitably be greatly reduced when all officers are based several miles away in Colindale.

**Dr Offord:** Is my constituency neighbour aware that the London Borough of Barnet is one of the largest London boroughs and one of the largest net contributors to the Metropolitan police budget? This means that we do not get the police officers that we pay for. There are 736 people in Barnet per officer, whereas the rest of London—excluding the City of Westminster—has just 529 residents per police officer. Does my right hon. Friend think that that is fair?

**Theresa Villiers:** I do not. I very much welcome my hon. Friend's highlighting of that problem. I am going to come on to it, because we need a fairer system for the allocation of resources in our capital city—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell).

I am concerned about the impact of the police station closure on visible police presence. Only today, I received a report of retailers being robbed in High Barnet, with a recent incident of men in balaclavas who were wielding weapons robbing a shop in broad daylight in front of frightened children. Over recent months, during the regular doorstep calls that I undertake in my constituency, many people have highlighted their anxiety about burglary. I appreciate that budgets are constrained, but I have appealed to the Mayor to give Barnet a fairer allocation of police resources to help provide concerted action on burglary and other crimes, including those involving the offensive weapons targeted in this Bill. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord), Barnet has fewer police per head than many other boroughs, although, sadly, we face a number of problems very similar to those of inner-London boroughs.

**Julian Knight:** What my right hon. Friend is saying is very resonant for me, because our police and crime commissioner closed our police station in Solihull. Burglars, in particular, often use fear-inducing weapons such as zombie knives and death stars to commit violence. Does she agree that this Bill is very welcome in that respect?

**Theresa Villiers:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Burglary is a deeply distressing crime for its victims, but unfortunately it can be made very much worse by threats of violence and the use of weapons of the type targeted by this Bill.

The Mayor of London does have choices with regard to resources. He has, for example, about half a billion pounds in reserves. He is proudly allocating £150 million a year to cycling measures. He had earmarked £60 million to pedestrianise Oxford Street. This is not the occasion

to debate the merits of those funding choices, but it shows that even with a small switch from those priorities to policing, the Mayor could keep our police station in Barnet open. It is not enough for him to seek to blame the resources he is given by Government. He has choices and he should make them in a responsible way that gives the suburbs their fair share of police resources.

Finally, I want to share with the House some very depressing news on a crime committed in my constituency at the weekend. On Sunday, thieves broke into the site of the Summer Soulstice festival in Mays Lane in Arkley. They used acetylene cutting gear and hammers to break into a safe and made off with over £45,000 in takings from the event that was awaiting transfer to the bank the next day. It seems that they may have deliberately planned the break-in to coincide with the England World cup game, when those clearing up after the festival had gone home to watch the football.

This crime is made all the more repellent by the fact that the Soulstice festival is entirely run by volunteers and all its proceeds go to a local charity, Cherry Lodge Cancer Care. The event was established in memory of Andy Weekes, who was sadly lost to cancer in 2006, and it has raised over a quarter of a million pounds for Cherry Lodge over the course of 11 years. The family of the late Andy Weekes and the whole team behind Soulstice are apparently devastated by what has happened. I am sure that the whole House will share my dismay about this crime. I do not imagine that the perpetrators are likely to read *Hansard*, but they should feel a deep sense of shame about what they have done. I very much hope that the police will catch them swiftly and that they will be locked up for a very long time indeed.

4.44 pm

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure, if that is the right word, to speak in this important debate. From the outset, may I say how much I associate myself with the comments made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) and in particular my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown)? The speeches by the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) and the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) were strong and compelling, particularly in their urging the Government to include a wider range of acidic substances in the list of those that we seek to prohibit the carrying of, particularly by those who are 18 or under.

I hope I will not be accused of making an overtly party political point. However, I have served for a short period as the Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, and I have listened to a huge number of speeches and oral questions at Home Office questions. Given that very often, though not exclusively, as my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester said, this is seen as a London-centric and urban daily threat, I am surprised by the lack of representation on the Opposition Benches today, with the exception of the fine speech by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), and the right hon. Member for East Ham and the hon. Member for West Ham. I am slightly surprised that those who have often spoken most loudly about the need for this legislation and what underpins the imperatives that drove it are conspicuous by their absence this afternoon.

[Simon Hoare]

Sunshine, I know, can be a rather seductive entity, but I thought they might have forgone that for just a few hours on an issue of this importance.

The key thing to bear in mind is that, while the debate is often painted within the confines of an urban narrative, this affects all our towns and cities across the country, as my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester said. On 7 January 2016, a hairdresser in my constituency, Katrina O'Hara, was putting the rubbish out at the end of the working day in the little courtyard behind the barbershop in which she worked in Blandford Forum. Blandford Forum is a jewel in the North Dorset crown. It is a small Georgian market town; it is not one of the fleshpots of metropolitan England by any stretch of the imagination. Katrina was attacked by a former partner with a knife that he had taken from the kitchen drawer in his house. He stabbed her. She died of her injuries. He attempted then to take his own life, but was apprehended and resuscitated by Dorset police. He was put on trial and found guilty.

I relate that story because, as one can imagine, it had the most huge and profound effects on a market town community like Blandford Forum. The ramifications of it still reverberate in conversations just over two years later. It was not a crime perpetrated by drug users or by minors, and it was not a crime in which somebody had to go out and buy a knife to use as a weapon, either directly from retail or on the internet; the knife was just taken out of a kitchen drawer. That is the scale of the issue that this sort of legislation is trying to grapple with.

There is much to commend in the Bill. The Home Office and the relevant Ministers are to be saluted for their clear care and dedication in the consultation process and in talking to Members. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave a commitment to my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds that that conversation would continue, and that is important.

As I say, there is much to commend in this legislation and the foundations of it are clear, but I would echo the comments made by a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and indeed by right hon. and hon. Members of the Opposition, about how, although the foundations may be very secure, the edifice emerging through the Committee process will require some work. On the eve of my 49th birthday, I may be able to claim some similarity with that. My foundations are fine—

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): You must be older than that.

**Mark Garnier:** His 59th—no, 69th—

**Simon Hoare:** I am ignoring the comments of my hon. Friends.

**Mark Garnier:** Give him a bus pass!

**Simon Hoare:** I'll give you something in a minute.

There is a clear and compelling narrative that some changes to the Bill are needed as it moves forward. What does the Bill seek to achieve? If anybody thinks that by the stroke of a legislative pen and the creation of new statutes these crimes will be eliminated—I am not suggesting for a moment that Ministers on the Treasury Bench believe this—they will find that that is not going to be the case, although the Bill will clearly act as a deterrent.

As so often, however, when putting in place deterrents, we have to be careful. We know who we are seeking to deter, but very often the legislative deterrent has no impact at all on their daily modus operandi of criminality, gangland behaviour, drug dealing and so on. However, as an unforeseen consequence, it may be the most terrible burden and nuisance to law-abiding citizens trying to go about their daily business or to pursue their hobby. As my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds mentioned, we quite rightly have one of the most, if not the most, rigorous firearm licensing regimes in the world, but, notwithstanding that, we still have gun crime. Previous legislation has made certain pistols and handguns illegal, but they are very often the preferred weapon of those in gangs and the weapon of choice of others engaged in criminal activity.

**Mark Garnier:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Simon Hoare:** Notwithstanding my hon. Friend's earlier rudery, I will give way.

**Mark Garnier:** I am sure my hon. Friend needs to take the weight off his feet for a moment or two during his magnificent speech. The important point he makes about gun crime is that it is committed not with legally owned guns, but with illegally owned guns. In keeping guns away from criminals, the law is probably not working as well as it should do, and that is what should be addressed.

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is right. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), was a prosecuting barrister in a previous life. She will know, as lots of other people do—[*Interruption.*] Ah, here she is; she arrives. As if by magic, my hon. Friend is summoned up. I was just saying that, in a previous existence, she was a prosecuting barrister, and I know—not least because she has told me this on so many occasions—that she will appreciate the importance of evidence. We are making law, and as important as the issues are that we are seeking to address, the law has to be based on evidence.

It may well be that there are certain things that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench cannot tell the House: there may be evidence from the National Crime Agency and others that it would be entirely inappropriate to share with those who are not Privy Counsellors, or whatever. However, I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier). Like colleagues, I have yet to find any canon of persuasive evidence that does not lead me, for what that is worth, to the conclusion that if we harry and pursue the softest targets—those who have a licence, those obeying the law to the letter and those who have clearly indicated, in response to consultation, their willingness to go the extra mile in terms of security, vetting, referencing and so on and so forth—they will be the ones most affected, without the concomitant benefit of increasing safety on our streets.

If there is evidence telling us that a whole cadre of crimes is committed on our streets by people who are licensed to have a shotgun or other firearm, clearly the House will need to recalibrate its message on that point.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** The problem would be if people who lawfully hold a shotgun or firearm see this legislation and think that they might be criminalised next. They fear that this is setting a precedent and they do not know where it is going to end.

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is right about that. Those who see these things as the opening of a Pandora's box are often right to see proposals in that way, and I am inclined to think that we are not necessarily looking at this from the right end of the telescope. I would much prefer a far more rigorous approach to sentencing, so that it actually acts as a deterrent, and my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester and others have intimated the same. I am not convinced that the criminal minds, the modern-day Fagins who recruit these often vulnerable youngsters to commit these crimes to aggrandise the Fagins of, particularly but not exclusively, the drug world, will give tuppence ha'penny about what statute law says. If they want to get hold of a shotgun or something else, they will jolly well do it. We need to be focusing a lot more attention on sentencing than we have hitherto.

Obviously, we have to do this as part of a legislative mosaic, which, as others have said, calls for even greater intergovernmental and cross-departmental working. *The Times* has been running an interesting series of articles this week. It has alluded to all the things that we know about gang culture—family breakdown, the lack of feeling of belonging, a lack of aspiration, poor educational attainment, and that self-breeding fear and anxiety that says, “I live in an unsafe area so I must tool up to protect myself.” In that way, the cycle just continues and continues. A lot of additional work needs to be done and other Departments need to be involved in it.

I wish to say a few words about the impact on small businesses. I do not understand the logic of a lot of these proposals on where and how one can sell, and on not delivering to a residential address. I am sure the Minister will be able to fill, to the point of overflowing, the lacuna in my knowledge of this, but I cannot understand the differential in respect of being able to have something delivered to a business premises or a post office, but not being able to have it delivered to one's own personal address—likewise, where the Bill says that even if someone has ordered something online, they have to collect it from the branch. That is fine for national operators, but I have received a number of representations on this. Some have come from Mr Duncan Chandler, an artisan manufacturer of woodland and survival knives in my constituency, who is anxious about this matter and the impact it has on his business. Others have come from Mr Philip Hart, who runs the excellent Harts of Stur, 80% of whose kitchenware, which includes knives, is sold online across the country—the company has only one branch and it is in North Dorset. I ask the Minister to think in Committee about the definition of “knife”. I am talking about rather peculiar things here and am flicking through my notes to try to find the reference point I was looking for but I cannot. I shall say merely refer to a constituent of mine who manufactures and sells straight razors for wet shaving. Are they to be included in the definition of “knife” or not? Will they fall within the new requirements?

In conclusion, I support this legislation. If it is pressed to a Division, I shall certainly vote in favour of its Second Reading, but with a presumption that there

will be some fairly dramatic changes in Committee: a greater understanding of the needs and difficulties of small businesses in particular, and an element of rural proofing. We are trying to address a national issue, but as it stands the Bill does not reflect some of the differentials between urban and rural living. I draw comfort from the fact that the Minister understands rural issues to her fingertips, representing, as she does, the second most beautiful part of the country after North Dorset.

5 pm

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare). I am sorry to have missed a few of the earlier speeches; I had to be at a sitting of the Home Affairs Committee. The quality of the debate has been excellent and I am happy to support the Bill. It is a pity that it has been made necessary in the light of a recent uptick in violent crime, and not only in London. As my hon. Friend just said, the devil will be in the detail when it comes to practical implementation. We all know that acid and knives are not in themselves offensive weapons; the person using them makes them so.

I do, however, have some reservations, which I share with a number of hon. Friends, about the proposals on .50 calibre rifles. Shooting is a legitimate pursuit for sport or countryside activities. As Members have said on numerous occasions, it is weapons held without a licence by criminals that cause the crimes. Legitimately held, licensed weapons are very rarely involved.

Our gun control laws are rightly among the tightest in the world. I do not want to do anything that would weaken that, and I would certainly not go down the absurd lines of President Trump's recent statement that the reason for our upsurge in knife crime is that we do not have gun ownership to combat it. That is a very slippery slope, and I do not think anybody has taken it seriously in this country, but we need to make sure that the restrictions are evidence based and properly risk assessed.

We are talking about fewer than 1,000 of the 2.25 million rifles and guns held legitimately on certificate—just 700 rapid-fire rifles and 132 .50 calibre rifles are involved. I have had more representations on that element of the Bill than on any other, particularly from disabled constituents who have used these rifles as part of their recreational activity.

The shooting community views these prohibitions as a gross breach of natural justice. Despite repeated requests, the Home Office has failed to provide any evidence that the rifles pose a risk to public safety. As it stands, applicants must provide clear and evidenced good reason for each and every rifle they wish to acquire and use. The very few who apply for and use high-muzzle-energy rifles have well documented and good reasons, and are limited to using them on specific ranges. Various shooting associations have suggested enhancing suitability assessments if that would help to prevent an outright ban, which seems disproportionate.

It is also reasonable to ask the Government what reductions in firearms crimes are expected as a result of the prohibitions in the Bill. It is difficult to see what problem we are trying to solve.

[Tim Loughton]

I have had representations from members of legitimate rifle clubs, such as the Aldershot Rifle and Pistol club. My constituent Martin runs the local disability forum. He shoots from a wheelchair using one of these guns. He started target shooting as an Air Training Corps cadet back in 1959. Prohibition would end his participation in the sport, because his disability means that it is not easy for him to use the alternatives. It is notable that of the 10,712 responses to the Government consultation, over 60% related to these firearms proposals.

I want to talk briefly about acid. I am pleased with the inclusion in the Bill of measures to deal with acid. This is a particularly cruel and vicious form of attack. People can recover from a gunshot or knife wound, with minimal scars in some cases, but the effects of acid are a life sentence of disfigurement, especially when acid has been used on the face. If anything, acid attacks deserve harsher sentences than attacks using some of the more conventional weapons we have been describing. The problem is that there are no official statistics on the extent of acid attacks. Voluntary data across 39 police forces found that there were some 408 acid attacks between November 2016 and April 2017, which represented a large increase on estimates that had gone before. It is also interesting that such attacks are prevalent in certain cultures, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, and among jilted partners. Globally, on the figures we have, 80% of the victims are women, but in this country the majority of victims are white men.

I pay tribute to the work of the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms). He is not in his place, but he spoke earlier. When I looked at this issue, I was astonished to find that acid is freely available online to anybody of any age, including children. Incredibly, certain forms of acid needed in the making, as my wife does, of jams and cordials are restricted to registered pharmacies, but this stuff can be bought online without any problem. It has to be right to restrict the sale, at least to under-18s. It has to be right to beef up the penalties for possessing harmful corrosive substances where they are intended to cause injury.

The devil will be in the detail. The evidence shows that only one offence in five involving acid is committed by a child under the age of 18. We need qualifications in the Bill on substances that are capable of causing permanent harm. There is also a worry about the number of people coming forward: according to the St Andrews Centre for Plastic Surgery and Burns, fewer than half of acid attack victims in this country pursue criminal charges against their attacker.

On knife crime, again we need make to the tools of violence as difficult to procure as possible. I see absolutely no legitimate reason for possession of zombie knives and so on. There are all sorts of problems: age-verification online, as trading standards has stated; what we do about weapons imported from overseas; and what the duty of care will be on Royal Mail and other carriers. The rise in knife crime in London has been particularly horrendous. What has been more worrying since 2014 is that the age of both victims and perpetrators has been getting younger and younger. That is, of course, drug related.

We have to look at the complicity of social media. The major social media companies have been in front of the Home Affairs Committee with regard to radicalisation,

access to hardcore imagery and hate crime. Increasingly, we are seeing easy accessibility to gang rap songs, with gangs brandishing and glorifying knives on social media platforms. That needs to be prevented in the first place and taken down immediately when spotted. Social media companies need to be much more responsible and proactive.

I query why the Bill does not, as far as I can see, extend the existing offence of having a knife or offensive weapon on school premises to cover other types of educational institution, as was covered in the consultation, but the problem is bigger than just the availability of offensive weapons, and bigger than just having stiffer sentences.

The measures in the Bill will increase the use of mandatory minimum custodial sentences for children, yet evidence shows that custody is failing in being rehabilitative. Last year, 69% of children released from custody reoffended within a year. That is a considerably higher figure than for those who were given community sentences, so we need to think much smarter about the criminal justice system and how we keep people out of jail and sustainably out of trouble.

Working in partnerships, we need to understand why gang culture in this country is increasingly using these weapons. I filmed a documentary back in 2009 called “Tower Block of Commons” in which I spent time with youth gangs in Newtown in inner-city Birmingham. Through the help of former gang members who then set up a charity to try to rehabilitate some of these people and bring them back in from the dark side, I began to understand some of the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of people who turn to gangs. This is about not just the penalties and the availability, but understanding the mindsets of the people who think it is good to use these weapons.

Finally, the Bill is just one part of a jigsaw, but we need to be smarter and take a much more holistic approach to violent youth crime.

5.11 pm

**Mr John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): It is a prevalent liberal misassumption that things can only get better. Their mindset is that progress is inevitable and that whatever we do, society will advance. It is true that, as Disraeli said:

“Change is inevitable...change is constant”,

but things can simultaneously deteriorate as well as improve. In my lifetime, there is no question but that that is exactly what has happened.

In the 60 years of my life—I know you are thinking, Mr Deputy Speaker, “How can that possibly be true? How can that callow youth standing before me possibly have been born in 1958?”, but it is true—civil society has been weakened, respect for authority has dwindled and many of the once routine civilities and courtesies that mitigate the inevitable pitfalls of human existence have been derided, eroded or abandoned. Consequently, life is less gentle than it was when I was a boy. Many have been brutalised and some are brutal. It is very difficult for the liberal establishment to come to terms with that, because the unhappy reality of increasing disorder and criminality contrasts with the myth of progress. It is therefore either disguised or ignored by those who cannot bear to face the facts.

I thought I would offer the Chamber some of those facts this afternoon. They are so extraordinary that when I researched them, I could barely believe them, but they are based on information available from the Library. In the year of my birth, 1958, the total number of violent criminal incidents was 31,522. At the end of 2014—a year for which the figures are available—the total number of violent incidents was 1,245,000. This is an extraordinary change. Even allowing for the change in population, which is significant, and for the changes in the definition of crime, which are not irrelevant, the truth is that there has been an explosion in the amount of serious and violent crime in our country. Most Members in this Chamber will know someone in their circle, family or beyond who has been a victim of some kind of serious or violent crime. Of course, we know that our constituents have been, but many of us will have encountered it in a much more familiar way than that.

**Will Quince:** Notwithstanding my right hon. Friend's point, does he accept that it has become a lot easier—in fact, has never been easier—to report a crime?

**Mr Hayes:** It is true that in criminal statistics there is the well-established principle of the dark figure—the number of crimes never discovered because they are never reported—and that this also needs to be taken into account in any comparative analysis, which is why I qualified mine heavily before I offered it.

None the less, in the year of my birth there were 1,194 recorded robberies; the number now, extraordinarily enough, is 74,130. We have had roughly a seventyfold increase in the number of robberies during the 60 years of my life. This is indeed an extraordinary change. As parliamentarians, our recognition and acceptance of this is an important part of reconnecting ourselves with the lives and assumptions of the people who suffer these kinds of crimes. The more we detach ourselves from this reality and bury our heads in the sand, the more people believe we either do not know or, worse, do not care. I know that people across the Chamber do care, but denial is not good enough.

That is why I welcome the Bill. It is an important acceptance that action is needed, that further measures are required. It is not, of course, the whole solution—the Government would not claim it was, as right hon. and hon. Members have said—but it is a step in the right direction, although it will need to be refined in Committee. I will not go into why and how, because that has been amply rehearsed already, but it is important to consider some of the issues the Bill deals with: the availability of weapons; how easy or difficult it is for the police to deal with prosecutions; and the culture associated with this increase in violence, particularly among the young and in urban areas.

Our preoccupation with the here and now does not help. We have a culture dominated by the immediate at the expense of measured contemplation. We no longer think about what was or might be; we think of now, and we do not want people to feel that now is worse than it once was. Yet, having that long-term view and more contemplative approach to public policy is an important way to deal with some of the things I have described.

The idea that things are not getting better is unpalatable, which is why the Bill is pertinent and welcome. Crime has many causes, and some have been rehearsed in the debate. They include communal disintegration, family breakdown and the absence of opportunity, but fundamentally criminal behaviour is about the absence of values—values that the law-abiding take as read: care for others, personal responsibility, respect for the rule of law. In the absence of those values, the gulf is filled by altogether less desirable things—greed, anger, sloth, lust, gluttony, envy, pride. They are not, after all, new sins; they have been common to the human condition since man was made—and the results can be deadly.

Crime is not an illness to be treated, and the perpetrators of crime are not patients. Crime is the product of choices that people make. Those choices might have been affected by their circumstances, but it is pretty insulting to working-class people of the kind I was brought up among to tell them they are more likely to be criminals because they live on a council estate, work in a factory or never had a formal education of the kind I and many here enjoyed. Let us be clear: we have to identify malevolent behaviour and deal with it appropriately in the interests of public respect for the fairness of the justice system. Every time we do not, we undermine the regard for the rule of law among less well-off people—those hard-working decent people who do the right thing and do not choose the course of crime but go about their lives in a peaceable, decent and honourable way.

Let us now think about what more needs to be done. Certainly we need to tackle some of the “drivers” of crime, as they have been described by other Members. I have mentioned a few, in the context of health and the life of civil society, but I think that the internet is, or can be, a malevolent influence in this regard. We need to get tough with the social media platforms that glamorise violence, and, in particular, glamorise the use of the weapons of violence.

As I suggested earlier to the Home Secretary, we also need to adopt a cross-departmental approach to deal with support for the family and support for communities. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh)—who I thought spoke extremely well, as I told her privately—mentioned early intervention. Early intervention does matter, and there is no better early intervention than a strong and stable family. My early intervention was my mum and dad, who taught me the difference between what was right and what was wrong. You can fudge these things, and you can have a high-flown debate in fancy terms about sociology, but in the end it comes back to that: people having a very fundamental sense of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, and what is good and what is bad behaviour. Families really matter in that respect.

We know that there is an association—if I may get sociological for a moment—between certain kinds of young people and crime. They tend to be young people whose families have broken down, and who have not had the role model of a strong father. We need to take a lateral approach in considering some of those causal factors.

Finally—

**Eddie Hughes:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Hayes:** No, because I want to conclude my remarks.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Mr Hughes, you are very close to the top of the list. I am sure you do not want to go down the list. I know that Mr Hayes is about to finish his speech. Come on, Mr Hayes.

**Mr Hayes:** As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, generosity is not merely my middle name; it is my every name. None the less, my dear friend will have to wait, because I am about to conclude my remarks.

The real risk with the Bill is not going too far, but not going far enough; not taking more steps than are necessary, but not taking the necessary steps. I will leave the House with Proust. Proust said, “You must never be afraid to go too far, because the truth lies beyond.” There is no Minister in this Government more committed to the pursuit of the truth than the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who will sum up the debate.

5.22 pm

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** I have to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I do not have any Proust. Instead, I will regale you with west midlands crime figures.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Crime figures will do fine.

**Julian Knight:** It is a great pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for the rather evocative-sounding South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). I thought that his speech was superb in its evocation and exploration of the rise in crime over such a long timescale. It was very informative indeed.

I agree with my right hon. Friend him about the glorification of knife culture in social media, which was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). We need to get a grip on social media companies, because they have a wide responsibility. They are not above and beyond society; they are part of society. We should not treat them in a way that makes them publishers, as it were, but they must be reminded of their responsibility to invest the necessary resources to ensure that such things are kept off their platforms, as quickly as possible.

This Bill represents a much-needed update in the law governing offensive weapons. It is an unfortunate fact that criminals are wont to adapt to new conditions when the law changes, so it is important for the Government to move swiftly to close loopholes when they arise.

I wanted to speak in the debate because of the almost silent gun and knife epidemic in the west midlands. It may surprise Members to know that the level of gun crime is higher there than it is in London: over 25 gun crimes per 100,000 people. In fact, the region is the only part of the country in which that level is reached. We also unfortunately have the third highest rate of knife crime of all areas of the country; only the Metropolitan police area and West Yorkshire are above us. To give a bit of context, Warwickshire abuts Birmingham and the West Midlands Police area, and knife crime in that area is about half the level that it is in the west midlands.

I see evidence of this on a regular basis in Solihull. We do not experience incidences of shootings and stabbings, thank goodness, at this time, and I hope this Bill will help to prevent any such incidences, but we are seeing a

growth in aggravated acquisitive crime involving knives, particularly terror-inducing knives such as death star and zombie knives. I think of death stars as planet-killing weapons from “Star Wars”. Death star knives are absolutely shocking and there is no need for that knife to be in production at all, and there is no need for any individual to purchase such a knife. As acquisitive crime, particularly car crime, has increased, I have heard reports that criminals have sometimes brandished those knives. At present, because London gets a lot of focus there is not sufficient focus to ensure that we crack down as hard as possible. That is one of the reasons why I support the Bill; it will help indirectly to keep my residents safe.

The response of the police and crime commissioner has not helped the situation at all. Despite a massive rise in acquisitive crime—over 29% over the past year in Solihull borough—he has chosen to close, without any proper consultation, Solihull police station, effectively leaving 209,000 people without a police station. We have been promised that at some unspecified date in future there will be a new front desk effectively; that could be in a shopping centre or in Chelmsley Wood in the north of the borough. As a resident of the south of the borough, I can say that it is easier for me to get to Warwick than to get to Chelmsley Wood in the north of the borough. What message does that send out to the public when we are seeing an increase in violent acquisitive crime? Residents are saying, “We are paying our council taxes; Solihull residents are paying for an increase in precept, yet the police station is being closed.”

That will lead to longer response times. The police station is located at the centre of the constituency and of Solihull borough. If it is located at some unspecified date in the future in the north, there will be longer response times, or officers might have to come out of area from Coventry or parts of Birmingham. My residents are extremely concerned about that.

Turning to the mechanics of the Bill, the main policy concern is about balancing the Government’s aims against the rights and liberties of individual citizens. I take on board the point that many hon. Friends have mentioned about .50 calibre rifles, and I am glad that those concerns are being listened to by the Government and there is active engagement. I, too, have been approached by the law-abiding shooting community, which is very cognisant of the need for gun control and very supportive of it. It has said to me that there is always a possibility that people could end up not being able to pursue their sport because of this change. I am pleased that we are at least looking at that and addressing it.

More generally, criminalising the possession of these articles will make it much easier for the police to intervene before they are used against the public—my constituents. The Bill introduces sensible requirements for online vendors to ensure that they are not selling restricted articles to under-age buyers; this is another example of how technology and evolving consumer habits can leave the law behind.

While these specific measures will no doubt help to reduce the presence of dangerous weapons in our public spaces, I am glad that the Government recognise that the problem of violent crime cannot be tackled in isolation. In the foreword to the “Serious Violence Strategy” published in April the then Home Secretary made it clear that she intended to wage a comprehensive campaign that included not only law enforcement but charities, communities and the private sector, as well as

health and education partners. That is commendable, and I hope that the Government will maintain that commitment, tackling not only violent crime but the driving forces behind it. That is something that has been reflected by the societal issues that have been raised in the debate today.

It is the first duty of the Government to protect the public, and it is right that the recent spate of vicious acid attacks has drawn a prompt legislative response. I have no doubt that the Bill will help to protect the public. This is the vilest crime that I can imagine. The horror of an individual splashing acid on to someone's face would keep many of us awake at night. These crimes follow people throughout their lives, and we have seen instances in which people have taken their lives as a result of such acid attacks.

In conclusion, I support the Bill. In almost every respect, it is a fit and good Bill, and I look forward to supporting it. More generally, I want to send a loud and clear message to the West Midlands police and crime commissioner that the Government are doing their job and that he now needs to do his by ensuring that my community is properly protected and that we have a working police station in a town of 209,000 people.

5.31 pm

**Ben Bradley** (Mansfield) (Con): I want to begin by welcoming the nature of this debate. I am a relatively new Member in this place, and this is unfortunately one of only a handful of times when I have sat through a debate where there has been genuinely measured and constructive comment from both sides and where Members have made new, interesting and constructive criticism of the Bill in question. I hope that the criticisms we have heard today will improve this one. I would single out the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who is no longer in her place, for her measured and positive contribution. I have actually gone through my speech and crossed out the passages that slagged off the Labour party, because it did not feel wholly appropriate to use them in this environment. This is not normally in my nature, but I have done it—[*Interruption.*] Disappointing, I know.

I welcome the Bill. It is an important step forward in keeping our communities safe. We have talked about the rise in crime. Broadly, it has come down over the past decade, but the changing nature of crime is all-important to the way in which we police it, and violent crime in particular has been on the rise. It is crucial that the police have the powers that they need to target the criminals effectively in relation to knife crime and a range of other issues that can contribute to it, including drugs. I mentioned that issue to the Home Secretary earlier, and I wrote to the Home Office about it only this week. The Bill aims to achieve exactly that, with new tough provisions to tackle knife crime and acid attacks.

In Mansfield and Warsop, we have had some issues with violent crime and the use of weapons. In April, there were 10 arrests for possessing a weapon. The majority of those were made around the town centre, which is becoming an increasingly unwelcoming place because of the growing problems of very public drug use, antisocial behaviour and violent crime. This is putting people off visiting our town centre, so this is not just about the safety of our local people; it is about the local economy and our town and our shops as well.

I hope that the Bill will enable the police to prosecute a greater number of offenders and keep my constituents in Mansfield safe. As my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) said, drugs are a huge driver of violent crime, and I hope that the Government will also build a strategy around the changing nature of the drugs market, which is having a huge impact in my constituency. I met Nick Butler, the neighbourhood policing inspector in Mansfield, earlier this month, and it was good to talk to him about his work and his priorities locally. It was clear from our conversation that, while police officers are working hard and are keen to catch criminals, they need the powers to do that and the ability to charge offenders robustly. I believe that the Bill will enable the police to do that more easily and to target this particular brand of criminals more effectively.

Legislation that creates extra controls on knives and corrosive substances that are bought online is important. Our laws need to keep up with technological change and the changing nature of violent crime. The Bill will make it harder for young people to buy knives and acid online, with sellers requiring rigorous age verification to prove that those purchasing knives or corrosives are over the age of 18. That is a huge step forward in tackling the changing way in which people get hold of those weapons. It is good news that crime has fallen by more than a third since 2010, but the increase in violent crime in particular is worrying, and I am glad that the Government are taking decisive action to tackle this issue.

The first serious violence strategy, which was commissioned by the Home Secretary and which is backed by £40 million of funding, marks an important step in our response to knife and gun crime. It strikes a balance between prevention and law enforcement, and crucially targets violent behaviours at an early age. As Members on both sides of the House have said, education, intervention and support are huge factors to go along with taking action against such weapons. Early intervention is incredibly important—the early intervention youth fund for community projects is another example of helping people to live lives free of violent crime. Other Government legislation can have an impact. Hon. Members have mentioned the impact of social media regulation on the lives of young people and their access to things that might radicalise them or promote violent behaviour.

I have come to a passage in my notes that I have crossed out—it was particularly mean about Labour—so I will move on to the clever things that other hon. Members have mentioned. I would have said them first had I been called earlier. If my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is correct on the detail, what he says makes perfect sense. There is no reason why threats with a knife made in the home should be any less of a priority than threats made in public areas. I am sure that the Minister more than recognises the impact of domestic violence, which is in her brief. She has been to Mansfield to meet domestic violence charities in my constituency and has seen the impact first hand—my constituency has the highest level of domestic violence in Nottinghamshire. I hope that the problem raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley can be improved at a later stage.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that our hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) made a good point when he

[Sir Greg Knight]

referred to police response times? The speed with which the police respond is important in snuffing out crime, particularly in developing situations in town centres.

**Ben Bradley:** My right hon. Friend is right. The police response to incidents is important. I am very pleased that the structures within our response and neighbourhood policing have changed. I hope that that and additional officers will improve the situation in Nottinghamshire—I am sure that that is replicated in other forces around the country.

A number of colleagues raised the distinction between weapons at the opposite ends of the scale—weapons used for crime and those used in sport, agriculture or rural communities that are safe and properly licensed. All the signs are that Government Front Benchers are listening and that those points will be carefully considered in Committee.

That said, the Bill is a significant commitment as part of our work to tackle serious violence and to make it harder than ever for people to get their hands on dangerous weapons. Banning the possession of weapons such as zombie knives and knuckledusters is a positive step. In many ways, it is unfortunate that we have to legislate—I am not naturally a proponent of banning lots of things—but this is an important and all-too-necessary part of the Bill.

The rise of acid attacks is simply horrific. Creating a new criminal offence of selling corrosive substances to under-18s is a positive step in the right direction, along with preventing the delivery of those substances to people's homes. Importantly, the Government will ensure that police have the powers to arrest people who carry such corrosive substances in public. I hope that we can continue to equip local police with robust powers, particularly to deal with the drugs issues that I have mentioned.

The Government are determined to help to prevent the sale and possession of dangerous weapons. This tough legislation will make it harder than ever for people to get their hands on them. I am glad we are taking decisive action and look forward to supporting the Bill.

5.38 pm

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): I want to explain briefly why I was so keen to intervene on my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) briefly popped into the Chamber. I am a fan and enthusiastic supporter of her manifesto for strengthening families and I wanted to acknowledge her presence while she was here, but you very wisely stopped me doing so, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The idea of banning stuff does not come naturally to me. I have the tendencies of a classical liberal inasmuch as I believe that the freedom of the individual is considerably more important. However, I agree wholeheartedly with two thirds of the banning provisions in the Bill. Why would I not? In fact, we might ask ourselves why we are having to ban these things. Why have they not been banned already?

Some Members will be much more conversant than I am with some of the terms used in the Bill, but I had to google the term “zombie knife” to understand what one is. The classic definition is that a zombie knife has a straight and a serrated cutting edge but also includes markings or wording that suggests the knife will be used for violent ends. The idea that we might sell such things, the idea that someone thought it a good idea to design such an overtly violent piece of equipment and then sell it, strikes me as a bit crazy in the first place, so we are unfortunate to be in this position.

My excellent local newspaper, the *Express & Star*, is, as has been mentioned previously, campaigning to ensure that other knives are considered for inclusion in future legislation. When we walk down the high street and see the range of what can only be described as weapons that are freely available, we need to ask ourselves what other purpose they could possibly have than to be used for acts of violence or intimidation.

Banning such knives is clearly a good idea, because they are obviously offensive weapons, but I am not naturally given to the idea of banning things. I recently read this in the paper—I do not know whether it is true, but I just could not make it up—but did Jamie Oliver really meet Nicola Sturgeon to consider the banning of two-for-one pizzas? I do not know, but that is what I read. A guy who has allegedly made £240 million from selling food now wants to dictate what the less well-off can eat. A good middle-class family could go to one of Jamie's restaurants and get a good deal on pizza, but he does not want the same opportunity for low-cost food to be extended to less well-off people. Counter-intuitive? Bonkers? Others can decide.

Instead of tackling the problem of children eating too much high-salt, high-energy food, how about endorsing the idea of a mile a day? All children should be encouraged to walk or run a mile a day, in the hope that the practice persists when they become adults. As someone who has spent six hours sat in the Chamber today, I would appreciate getting out to do my mile. I look forward to some exercise after this debate.

The idea that people might carry acid in public, in small amounts, for purposes other than to do harm to others is clearly also counter-intuitive, and it is something that we should ban.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my very good and hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. I do not understand how anyone can be allowed to buy acid except for scientific purposes; I just do not understand how that can happen in our society. What purpose would it serve other than to do bad?

**Eddie Hughes:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. When people from the outside world look into this Chamber, they will question why some of these things are not already against the law. I am a member of the Women and Equalities Committee, and in this Chamber we recently debated upskirting, which is another example of something about which the general public would surely think, “Are you crazy? Surely this should be against the law already.”

My hon. Friend makes a valid point, but perhaps we are asking and addressing the wrong question. By the time a young gang member, typically aged between 14 and 24, picks up a knife to carry out an assault, we have already failed them. A number of Government

programmes are upstreaming the work to try to prevent people from getting to that point in the first place. For example, £920 million has been invested in the troubled families programme, which started in 2011. A subsequent round of funding was agreed for 2015 to 2020, with the aim of reaching 400,000 families. It has had some mixed reviews of its effect, but the idea is that there are a certain number of families in communities—everybody knows who they are—who require intensive support from several agencies, both governmental and voluntary, and they need to be where we maximise our focus and effort because, as I said, once someone is in a gang something has already gone wrong.

Before I came to the House, I worked for the YMCA in Birmingham, a charity that supports young, previously homeless people. It has 300 accommodation units, but it does not just provide accommodation; it helps vulnerable people who need a wide range of support. These are people who are not used to accessing medical and health services in the way the rest of us would; they need to be got up in the morning and shown the way to the dentist and to the doctor so that they can attend appointments. It is clear that fragile people who are offered support can be saved from a life of crime and gang culture. Often, those who engage in gang culture are reaching out for some validation—for somebody to say, “You’re welcome in our group, we will protect and support you, and you will be one of us.” That is surely the embodiment of what we consider family to be.

I completely endorse some elements of the Bill, but I am still confused about the measures on firearms. Members spoke eloquently earlier and from an informed position, asking, “Why are we trying to ban something that has super-limited previous exposure to crime and that is, generally speaking, held by people who have already gone through all sorts of security checks and is held in the most secure way?” Those provisions possibly feel like a step too far, so I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State say he would further consider that element of the Bill.

As a Government, we are doing the right thing by offering a broad range of support to the most vulnerable young people in society, because the upstreaming of support is incredibly important, and we should indeed be banning these weapons.

Finally, I have had a long-running disagreement with the West Midlands police and crime commissioner. He is moving police officers from Bloxwich in my constituency to Wolverhampton, thereby reducing response times and moving those officers away from the community that they serve. That is not a good move. The Government have provided him with extra resource by allowing him to increase the precept to put more police on the street, but he has patently failed to do so, because he believes that that money is better spent on office staff. That is completely wrong.

5.47 pm

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes). He is part of a small coterie of us who have sat through the whole of this afternoon’s debate, so I feel some sense of camaraderie with him.

There is a lot in the Bill to be welcomed. I think I speak for many in the House when I say that any legislation that improves our constituents’ safety is to be

applauded. However, I wish gently to advise the Minister that legislation alone is not a panacea for reducing crime in the United Kingdom. Indeed, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) and my hon. Friends the Members for Solihull (Julian Knight), for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) have all said, the PCC determines priorities, and that affects the level of crime.

As a London MP, I can speak only about London. It is a fact that crime is on the rise in our capital and has been since the incumbent Mayor was elected. I say with no particular pleasure that it is rather disappointing that his standard excuse is that he could tackle the problem of violent crime if he had more resources. I certainly do not agree with that point of view. It is completely disingenuous of the London Mayor to demand more funding. The Government have continually provided financial support to him, including through a scheme for him to receive a cut from business rates, which has provided an additional £60 million. The Government have also allowed the Mayor to raise council tax to bring in an additional £49 million to support the police service in London. Therefore, overall, the Government have supported the Mayor by giving him access to more than £110 million, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet and my hon. Friends the Members for Solihull and for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) have mentioned. Then of course there are the millions of pounds that the Mayor of London holds in reserves.

All police services need legislation to address changing criminal behaviour. The vile issue of acid attacks is just one of those where the law needs to catch up. Indeed, under Ken Livingstone crime started to go up, but his replacement—my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—Stephen Greenhalgh, who has already been mentioned, and my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) made it a political priority to address violent crime, particularly crime affecting young people. History proves to us that policing is not just about money and legislation, but about political will.

I am very pleased to see that my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire has entered the Chamber and is in his place because I wish to mention the article he wrote in January for the *Evening Standard*. He said that when he was appointed deputy mayor for policing in London, the number of teenage murders in his first year was 29. He made it a political priority to address that rise and ensured that, when he left office, the number had been reduced to eight. The trajectory that he was previously on would have put the number of deaths at more than 50. The number of deaths in London now is about 80, so we are at a higher level.

My hon. Friend said that there was a culture in the Metropolitan police whereby teen murders were not considered statistically high in comparison with other world cities. That is appalling. He also said that the view of the Met police was that deaths of black youths were considered a fact of city life. That is abhorrent. He also outlined in his piece that many of the initiatives were controversial because they disproportionately affected black communities. That required him and the Mayor continuously to reassure communities that their actions were keeping their children safe. That is a commitment that the current Mayor should accept.

[Dr Matthew Offord]

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), who has returned to her place but who is perhaps not entirely listening to me, made a claim that crime in London was not actually increasing—or that it was doing so proportionally slower than in the rest of the country. There are reasons for that. The significant population of London shows that any percentage increase has a disproportionate effect on crime. Under the leadership of the current Mayor, London is undergoing a surge in violent crime. Since the beginning of his mayoralty, acid attacks are up 65%, knife crime is up 44%, homicide is up 16%, GBH is up 8% and rape is up 36%. Indeed, the chairman of the London Police and Crime Committee has launched an inquiry into why policing in London is failing. He says that the rise is not only unacceptable but deeply troubling.

Back in April, seven people were murdered in the capital, and when asked repeatedly whether he had met the bereaved families, the Mayor told LBC Radio:

“No, I haven’t spoken to the bereaved families. I’ve got a deputy mayor and a police commissioner...the point is that we are a team.”

Well, I can say that, no, they are not. We introduced police and crime commissioners so that someone was accountable—so that an individual could be held responsible. That job is held by one person, and in London it is the Mayor. He may have a team supporting him, but he must take the lead, show leadership and stop hiding behind his employees. His standard response to any criticism is to release a press release, but given the fact that he has increased the budget of his press and public relations team to £2.5 million, he has time to do that. Recently, he put out a press release asking schools to take up his knife wand policy, which is laudable in its aspiration, but he had a take-up rate of just 2.4% of London schools. That has to be wrong, and it is not keeping our children safe.

In addition to the legislation that we are discussing today, there are lots of other things that the Mayor of London can do to tackle knife crime.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** May I just advise the hon. Gentleman that the Bill is not a personal attack on the Mayor of London? [Interruption.] I am sorry; did the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) say something?

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** I didn’t say anything.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I thank you for that, because otherwise I would have something to say and that would not be helpful to you. I am just trying to be constructive. We are on Second Reading of a Bill, and I am allowing latitude, but Members must focus on the Bill.

**Dr Offord:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is certainly not a personal attack. I can only illustrate my experience in the capital—[Interruption.]

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Spelthorne is helping out again. Let me just reassure you: the Bill is about knife crime, and not about other issues. As much as you think you are getting good advice from the hon. Gentleman, I would take your advice from the Chair.

**Dr Offord:** I was not sure who you were speaking to, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** I just want to intervene on my hon. Friend to say that I was simply making a personal remark to myself; I was not addressing the House. I am very pleased that my hon. Friend is focusing on the issues related to the Bill that apply directly to the capital.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I want to move the Bill on, and I want to ensure that we do not need to have a time limit. Please, let us carry on.

**Dr Offord:** Whether it is the Mayor of London or any police and crime commissioner, I feel that they could all do certain things to tackle knife crime, including better community engagement, better use of stop and search, and the provision of preventive initiatives.

There are several parts of the Bill which I have some concerns about. I am never convinced that attaining the age of 18 should allow an individual to engage in any particular kind of behaviour or activity, whether that is drinking, voting, fighting in the armed forces or buying bleach. I therefore have some concerns about the age of 18 with regard to the provisions in the Bill. It is my understanding that the Home Office does not regularly collect data on the age of those engaging in acid attacks, but information collected from 39 forces showed that only one in five acid attacks was committed by a person under the age of 18. This leads to questions about whether the person who has purchased the substances is over or under the age of 18. I hope the Minister will take up this issue and legislate on it.

While preparing for this debate, I had a look on the internet to see how easy it is to purchase a knife online—for example, on eBay. I was pleasantly surprised to find that flick knives, gravity knives and zombie knives are not readily available. However, kitchen knives are, so the provision in the Bill that seeks to ban knives being sent through the post does not seem to be a very effective use of the legislation, given that most knives used in crime usually come from kitchen drawers.

I would also like some detail on the proposal to make the possession of a knife on a further education premises an offence. As has been mentioned, there are some scenarios where this is permissible. In the case of training, gamekeepers, chefs, cooks, hairdressers, electricians, builders and carpenters all require a bladed instrument, so in many respects these people will have to be excluded from the provisions.

The Bill seeks to ban the .5 calibre rifles that many Members have spoken about today, but these are legally held weapons. The owners have been vetted. They have been through a process where they have been judged to be not only competent but safe to own a gun. Many of them also regularly attend a club. I therefore have to ask, what does this have to do with violent crime? The owners have exemplary records and are among the most law-abiding people in this country, so why are they being victimised when they have nothing to do with violence, particularly in cities such as London?

The reason I am very interested in knife crime is that I witnessed someone being stabbed in 1990. It was, as my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) said, quite an experience. It certainly had an impact

on me. I was actually photographing at the time, and was pleased that I managed to take a picture of the perpetrator. He was subsequently convicted, but would not have been if not for my picture. My recollection of the person who fell into my arms with a big hole in his back will certainly never leave me.

We are approaching 80 murders within the capital this year. I conclude by mentioning two people, who were both my constituents. Back in the winter in Mill Hill, Vijay Patel was punched, hit his head and died; and Raul Nicolaie was stabbed to death in his house. I believe that this legislation will ensure that such tragedies do not occur in the future. I appeal to the Minister: if there is to be any legacy from this legislation, let this be her legacy, because the legacy of the Mayor of London currently is one of a lost generation.

5.58 pm

**Kwasi Kwarteng** (Spelthorne) (Con): I am delighted to speak in this debate, and, like a number of people, I have had the honour and privilege to sit through the vast proportion of it. The debate has been well conducted, with a lot of speeches touching on a number of important issues.

The issue of knife crime and murder in our capital city of London is highly relevant to the Bill. Let no one pretend that what is happening in London has not directly influenced the Government in their desire to see some form of legislation on this particular issue. The situation in the capital is, frankly, scandalous.

When my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) was Deputy Mayor in charge of policing, the crime rates were significantly lower than they are today. That was because of policy and political leadership. It is entirely legitimate to suggest that the kind of leadership that London had at that time no longer exists. It would be invidious, I fully agree, to blame the current Mayor of London entirely for the situation in the capital. I am not saying that it is all his fault, but he does bear some responsibility for it.

It is no accident that, given the increase in knife crime and the increase in fatalities here in London—in our capital—the Government have introduced the Bill. Those two events, I would suggest, are related. It is therefore entirely appropriate for Members who represent London seats—my seat is just outside London, but many of the issues in London pertain to the bit of Surrey that I represent—to address and focus their remarks on the situation here in London.

The Bill has many excellent provisions. Surely the laws against selling dangerous acid to youngsters—to children, in many instances—are well overdue and will be well received across the House. There are issues relating to knives. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) said that he thought it extraordinary that so-called zombie knives had not been banned a long time ago. He was quite right to suggest that the manufacturers of these knives—and their designers, if one can call them that—clearly fully expected that the knives would be used not only to commit grievous, violent crimes, but to threaten and intimidate. There seems to be no other reason that such knives should have been manufactured. Not even for ornamental reasons would the case be a strong one.

Some provisions in the Bill have rightly caused a measure of concern among Conservative Members. The proposed ban on .5 calibre guns seems a little excessive because, as many Members have pointed out, these guns have never been used, as far as we know, in the commission of violent crimes. Banning them therefore seems wholly disproportionate to the threat that they actually pose to members of the public. As has been observed many times in this debate, people who possess these weapons are vetted. They have gone through a measure of screening. They are people who are law-abiding. They pursue their interest in arms in clubs. They practise their activities in highly regulated and very safe conditions.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. As he knows, the Bill has been drafted in such a way as to refer not to .5 calibre rounds, but to 13,600 joules of energy. The reason for doing that is to include other weapons, including .357 Lapua Magnum rifles, but that cannot account for the people who use home loads and lower the velocity of the round. The Bill is about whether the rifle is capable of firing it. People do use home loads, and they lower the capacity, the velocity and energy. The Bill does not account for that at all.

**Kwasi Kwarteng**: As I suggested, there is a social context that gave birth to the Bill—a huge increase in violent crime and fatalities in London. The two things, as I said, are related. If the Government are trying to address the issue of knife crime and fatalities in our capital, it is beyond my imagination to understand why .5 calibre guns should be banned as proposed in the Bill.

I am delighted that the Secretary of State has openly and generously offered to meet MPs and other people for a wider consultation on the details in the Bill.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown**: The hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) has put his finger on an interesting point. Clause 28(2) references “any rifle” from which a shot of more than 13,600 joules can be fired. The Bill is drafted much wider than just .5 calibre weapons.

**Kwasi Kwarteng**: That is a legitimate point. I hope that many of these difficulties and anomalies will be ironed out in Committee, because the Bill as drafted raises some interesting questions and, dare I say it, has a number of holes.

Broadly, we have to accept that something had to be done. The new spate of acid attacks is largely unprecedented. I understand, as a point of history, that in the 19th century people used sulphuric acid and other noxious substances in this way, but for our generation this is completely unprecedented, and it is quite right for the Government to legislate to curtail the sale of this offensive weapon.

Broadly, this is a good Bill and I am fully happy to support its Second Reading, as I suspect are the vast majority of Members on both sides of the House, but I urge Ministers to consider some of the objections made in this wide-ranging and stimulating debate to certain of its provisions.

6.5 pm

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): Prior to the debate, we were furnished with a huge number of statistics, and those statistics make stark and appalling reading, because behind every one of them is a real life that has been lost, a family that has been destroyed or a person left with life-changing disfigurement and injury. In 2017—a particularly bad year—we saw a 22% increase in offences involving knives, an 11% increase in firearms offences and a near tripling of recorded corrosive substance attacks. Within a few miles of where we sit, in the city of London, we have seen more than 70 murders just this year.

I am pleased that a good proportion of the Bill is devoted to putting on a statutory footing many of the voluntary commitments that retailers have given over the last couple of years, and I know that many local authorities have worked with local traders to implement codes of practice regarding knife and corrosive substance sales. I am also pleased that the Bill extends to internet business-to-consumer sales, which is long overdue.

Clauses 12 to 27 contain expansive measures to restrict and control the supply and ownership of bladed items. That has been mentioned at length this afternoon, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes). We need a complete prohibition of these things called zombie knives, which are particularly fearsome and have no value in what they look like. They are not like 18th-century samurai swords; they have one sole purpose. They have cutting, serrated edges and are deemed and bought to be threatening and offensive.

**Bob Stewart:** I am particularly concerned that on the internet, for under a tenner, one can buy a commando knife, which is the ultimate killing knife.

**Craig Mackinlay:** My hon. Friend is all too aware of the use of such weapons from his previous life. He makes a valid point—it is not just zombie knives. All manner of offensive and dangerous weapons are available out there.

The provisions related to bladed articles are proportionate, robust and to be welcomed. However, the great problem, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) spoke, is that in every single kitchen in every single house there are the tools available to cause havoc on our streets. No matter how we frame the Bill, it is very difficult to legislate against the domestic knives that exist absolutely everywhere and are too often the weapon responsible for murders on the streets of this country.

Also, we heard clearly from my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) that we must be careful not to criminalise the legitimate sale of bespoke, expensive cutlery by mail order. That is a consideration.

The great difficulty, which I do not think this Bill fully addresses, is sale on the internet from foreign sources to domestic customers in this country. It is obviously impossible for a UK Bill to extend its remit extraterritorially, but I recommend that the Minister give serious thought, either this afternoon or in Committee, to including in the Bill a provision for responsibility to fall on the agent company that has facilitated the trade—whether a corporate body such as eBay or Amazon, or something else. These have become the primary facilitators

of foreign business transactions and of selling to UK domestic consumers, and it is time they bore responsibility for what they are doing.

I understand the thinking behind the provisions in clauses 28 and 29, relating to high muzzle velocity rifles, but in my view this precautionary principle simply goes too far. As many right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned, there are no cases at all of high muzzle velocity or high-energy rifles being used in any criminal act. It is also beyond me how it was decided that 13,600 joules—or 10,000 foot-pounds in old money—should be the limit. Why not 13,500 joules or 10,000 joules, or anything else?

These are obviously powerful weapons, and they could be used as a sniper rifle, for instance, but they have never been used as such. They are large, heavy and unwieldy, and they have never been used for such purposes. For those who want to own such weapons, the reality is that it is very difficult to get hold of one. People are required to apply for a firearms certificate, which means an interview by the local police force, a Disclosure and Barring Service check and security measures in their house to ensure that any such weapon is securely stored, while increasingly—this applies across many police forces—their vetting will need to be confirmed by a GP.

Given the numbers involved, these provisions are ill thought out. As the Minister will be aware, the handgun—banned since 1997, but all too easily obtained and illegally held—is the criminal's weapon of choice. This weapon is the killer on the street. Banning high-power rifles, on the basis of what I consider an overweening precautionary principle, would be as daft as banning vans or lorries, which in some circumstances can be, and have been, used as offensive and lethal weapons.

I support the thrust of the Bill—I absolutely support the measures against bladed weapons and chemicals—but I ask for some sensible thinking about single-shot high-energy rifles. I really beg the Minister to look again at internet facilitators, because it is time that they took responsibility for connecting businesses abroad with consumers at home and that they were held accountable for what they are doing in the consumer market.

6.13 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Many of my constituents in Chelmsford write to tell me how concerned they are about the changing nature of crime. They know that crime overall has dropped, but they see more crime happening online and more violent crime. This morning, I spoke to my police and crime commissioner to make sure that I was fully up to date with what was happening on the streets. Violence with injury has increased by over 10% in Chelmsford in the past year, although that is lower than the national increase of 15%. Possession of weapons has increased by nearly 50%, and there has been a rise in wounding with intent.

My police and crime commissioner says that the police are doing a great deal. Operation Raptor is under review, while Operation Survey, which is targeted at serious violence, has also been helpful. They are launching their new violence and vulnerability framework, and they believe that they can get ahead of this surge. However, they want to make more use of stop-and-search, and a commitment to more policing resources. We know that a lot of this is related to county lines, and that the increased crime is related to the more complex

ways in which drugs are moved around the country by gangs. The Government and Parliament need to take a lot of action.

As elected politicians, our top priority is to care about the safety of those we represent, who expect us to act. The police and crime commissioner made a comment about extra resources. I was pleased to work last year with colleagues from across Essex in making a strong statement to the Policing Minister about the need to increase the cap on local police funding so that our police would get the resources that they need. Those extra 150 police officers are now being recruited and are going into action across Chelmsford.

We can do more about some of the causes of crime. In an intervention, I mentioned the young people who are being recruited into drugs-related gangs through online platforms. The evidence in the Science and Technology Committee was to do with drill music being played through YouTube; those who had written it could then directly message the young people. The point made in the Committee was that that could happen to any teenager and that no one is immune. That has definitely been seen in Chelmsford. I believe that we will act on this issue through the internet safety strategy, about which I have just had a meeting with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

There is also the issue of what weapons are being used—that is why we are discussing this Bill about offensive weapons. We need to strengthen laws to prevent the possession and sale of knives in particular. I have seen many images shared by my local police of knives that they have intercepted—particularly the “zombie killer” type. I am pleased that the Government are taking action on knives.

There is also the issue of acid attacks. A few months ago, I visited Chelmsford mosque and spoke to some of the young people about what they felt as they went around the streets these days. I was taken by how many young members of that community referred to how concerned they were about recent acid attacks, particularly those carried out on some sort of religious grounds. If I can go back to that group now and say that we are strengthening the law to make it illegal for young people to buy acid and to carry it in a public place, that will be an extremely important and positive message. I am glad that such provisions are in the Bill.

I turn to firearms legislation. I never expected to spend a lot of my life as a politician working on that issue, but I do spend an enormous amount of time on it. I led the reform of European firearms legislation through the European Parliament a couple of years ago following the Paris attacks in the Bataclan theatre, where firearms that had supposedly been permanently deactivated—they therefore could be bought and sold without licences in many parts of Europe—were actually not deactivated. Pins had simply been put through the barrels; they were pulled out and the firearms were reactivated by the terrorists. Ninety people were murdered in that attack.

In the UK, we were not immune: 35 of those same firearms were found in a marina on our shores, having been smuggled here. The then Home Secretary—the current Prime Minister—went to Europe and said that we needed to tighten up European gun laws because those affect our own security. I must make one point: those incorrectly deactivated firearms could not have

been bought and sold under our law without a licence because the UK has among the strongest—if not the strongest—firearms legislation of anywhere in Europe. It was absolutely in our interest to make sure that the rest of Europe rose to that challenge.

**Jim Shannon:** The hon. Lady is correct about the measures relating to firearms. Does she agree that those who transgress and break the law are not those who have a licence to hold arms legally? The Government need to focus attention on the law breakers, not those who uphold the law.

**Vicky Ford:** I completely agree and that brings me to my next point. What I learnt from looking at our firearms legislation, and firearms legislation across the continent of Europe and in Ireland, is that there are many very good reasons why genuine law-abiding people may need to have a firearm. There are particular sensitivities relating to personal security in Northern Ireland, where many people have permission to hold firearms that would not be permitted in other parts of the UK. The devil is in the detail and it is really important detail. There are many legitimate reasons for why people might want to hold firearms. They could be historical re-enactors, filmmakers—Britain has more filmmakers using firearms than anywhere else in the world, which is one reason why we have such an active filmmaking industry—farmers, target shooters or people involved in the countryside.

My concern is that the Bill makes changes to what firearms are available to law-abiding citizens. Measures have possibly been strengthened without thinking through all the consequences. If I may, Mr Speaker, I would like to read just one email I received from a constituent:

“I completely agree with the other sections of the Bill, but believe that these restrictions on the shooting community unfairly target law-abiding members of our society. I am a keen target shooter and police officer, and I don’t see how these restrictions will cut down on the amount of gun crime on our streets. I have yet to see any of this type of firearm that is due to be restricted used in any criminal activity.”

If we are to tighten the law in this area, we need to make sure that we maintain the confidence of the law-abiding gun-holding community and make sure we can explain to them the evidence the Minister has seen for changing the law.

6.22 pm

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford).

I have had the opportunity to listen to the majority of contributions to the debate, but I would like to start my contribution by paying tribute to the Minister. She has gone out of her way—I have heard other Members refer to this as well—to go through the content of the Bill in detail, and to listen thoughtfully, productively and passionately to the arguments put forward. She knows that most of our arguments with the Bill focus on the firearms aspects, but I shall speak about the whole Bill in its current form.

My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) made a comment about not understanding why anyone would need to buy acid if they were not a scientist. I can only assume that he can afford a very good cleaner who has to procure and use such acids in his own home. There are many legitimate reasons why individuals might wish to buy acid—I am delighted for

[Gavin Robinson]

him that he does not have to go through the trials and tribulations of normal life like the rest of us—whether in a domestic setting, or for agricultural use. In industry, hydrochloride is regularly used for cleaning.

There are legitimate reasons for buying acid, but there have been incredibly harmful and distressing illegitimate uses of acid for personal attacks, and some for personal defence. They horrify us. We have seen the news stories and the ramifications. We have seen the efforts of countless passers-by and members of society who come along with bottles of water to try to clear acid from a victim's eyes and skin. It is obnoxious that anyone would seek to use domestic acids for such a cruel purpose.

It is right that we as a Parliament decide that enough is enough and take steps to frustrate the purchase and illegal use of acid. This does not mean that acid will not be available if somebody really wants to get their hands on it, but the Bill will empower the police, giving them the powers to stop people having it who should not have it in a public place. That is the right step to take.

The Minister also knows that we raised some practical points relating to proposals on postage and delivery for the online purchase of blades. This issue is important, because if we look at Parliament's consideration of online sales and its scrutiny through Select Committees of how online sellers and marketplaces describe themselves, we see that they have thoughtfully avoided much of the legislative restriction that we have sought to place on them, because they say that they only facilitate sales and that the contract is with the individual seller, not the marketplace. Whether it is Amazon or eBay, they have all argued, "Yes, you can have whatever legislative provision you want, but it does not attach to us—it attaches to the person who uses us as a forum to sell."

Whether we do this with online delivery charges and considerations around the unfairness of differences in postal charges, it will be important, for the provision on the delivery of knives in particular, that we have complete buy-in and sign-up from the marketplaces, rather than just the sellers. It is important to make sure that we know who is buying the blade and that they are able to buy it—that they are of a legal age and we know their identity—and we need to make sure that all who are involved in the process adhere to the Bill. I hope that the Minister has thought about that, engaged with the online sellers and taken the opportunity to tell them that they also have a duty in this process.

I was flicking through my phone 20 minutes ago—I will not say who was speaking at the time, but it was no reflection on their contribution—but zombie knives and combat knives are available for purchase. People can go on websites that say, "Here are UK legal blades. Here are blades that fold, that are less than three inches, that are suitable penknives for sporting purposes, and so on," but many other sites will callously sell something that is designed to hurt, injure or kill. Having seen and heard the outrageous and horrendous stories in our broadsheets, on our television screens, in our communities and from our constituents, it is important that we take steps—I am not saying that this is entirely the right way to frame the legislation—to provide protection in our community. Having never had the privilege of serving on a Bill Committee and being very unlikely to have the

privilege of doing so, I hope that members of this Bill's Committee will take the opportunity to thoughtfully consider the provisions and augment them in a way that will ensure that the Bill will do what the Minister hopes.

Let me turn, in particular, to the firearms provisions. I made an intervention that touched on energy and velocity, and I think there are fundamental issues, which I raised with the Minister. The first is about safety. When we consider safety, why is something above 13,600 joules unsafe but something under that is not? Why does this Parliament need to interject ourselves in this discussion? Are we saying that 13,599 joules is okay? Is it any less lethal? No, it is not.

**Jim Shannon:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In this Bill, the Government are considering removing .50 calibre rifles of a certain velocity. If someone shortens the barrel or reduces the load, however, they can reduce the impact of a .50 calibre rifle or anything else of that size. There are other ways to do this so that law-abiding people can obtain these guns.

**Gavin Robinson:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but this is about the purpose of the Bill. What are we trying to achieve? Is it to make the public safer? The arbitrary figure of 13,600 joules cannot make the public safer. We are talking about law-abiding sport enthusiasts who have been through all the processes, as has been discussed this afternoon. Are we saying that 13,599 joules is okay, but 13,601 joules is not? It makes no sense. It is not just .50 calibre rifles either; it is exactly the same for .357 Lapua Magnum rifles. It does not matter if someone home loads, as my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, and lowers the velocity of the round, because the Bill is framed so that what matters is not what they put through a firearm but what the firearm is capable of delivering.

I am afraid that the public safety test in the Bill does not cut it. A .22 rifle can remove life and has a much lower velocity. Families often introduce their young ones to the sport of firearms shooting—target shooting, plinking around the farm—with .22 rifles or air rifles, but a person can still lose their life from a .22. What, then, are we trying to achieve? What arguments and evidence base has the Home Office used to advance these provisions? I do not think they have any, and neither do sporting enthusiasts throughout the country. There has never been any discernible or detected use of rifles of this calibre, legally held, in the commission of a crime.

Some mention was made of the Northern Ireland provisions that allow us to access handguns and other firearms that people cannot access in the rest of the UK. That is true. Several Members of this House are in that position. Every time a person purchases a firearm of that capacity—handgun size, whether a 9 mm, a .40 calibre, a .45 ACP, or whatever—they must first apply for permission and show justifiable grounds for having one and then, shortly after purchasing it, hand it in to the police. They then take it away and put it through forensics and ballistics testing so that if that legally held and approved firearm were ever used and in the commissioning of, or during, a crime and the case left where it was used, the ballistics report would tell the police that it was that person's firearm.

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): Of course, the hon. Gentleman was about to say that it is also subject to a ministerial decision about who should be allowed to carry a personal protection weapon in Northern Ireland. Is this not a very regulated market?

**Gavin Robinson:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but it is subject to a ministerial decision only if the person fails to satisfy the conditions earlier in the process. The right hon. Gentleman served as a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office and has regularly and routinely seen the constraints and strictures, and how strenuous is the process to ensure that only appropriately approved people have access to firearms and in an appropriate way. The Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 and the guidance from the NIO outline the conditions under which a person can make an application.

The important point, however, is that the ballistics and forensics evidence is there for those firearms. The same process could be applied to these circumstances. The approach in the Bill is to constrain access to 13,600 joules of energy—to use the term in the Bill—coming from a firearm. A similar forensics report could be made of that firearm and held by the state so that should that legally held firearm ever be used in the commissioning of crime, which has never happened before, the state would know whose weapon it was. It would be very simple, and I suggest that it should be considered in Committee as a further step to strengthen the existing provisions.

Let me make another point, on which I know I will have no support from Conservative Members. In Northern Ireland, no one can have an air rifle unless it is registered on a firearms certificate. An air rifle can be a deadly weapon. It may be a .177, it may take a small slug, it may operate through the force of air rather than black powder, but it can still be a lethal weapon. Air rifles are not even registered on firearms certificates in England. However, we are imposing serious restrictions on sporting pursuits which I think are unnecessary.

I have canvassed the Minister on the bump stock proposal, and I accept the argument that has been advanced. I think it absolutely right that bump stocks cannot be used in this country, and that the Bill allows the police to seize them. That is a fair argument, and one that we support. As the Minister will know, it has been argued that MARS rifles are useful to disabled shooters, giving access to the sport to those who have trouble handling bolts. I accept that, so far, none of the Paralympic shooting organisations—or, indeed, any of the national shooting organisations—have produced any evidence to substantiate that argument, but I trust that it will be considered later in the Bill's passage.

We need to engage in very productive consideration. What are the reasons, what are the root causes, and how do we address the fears that are associated with some of these items? I have talked about the money that has just been invested in the .50 calibre range at Silverstone, which was specifically designed to be a safe environment for the use of such rifles, but they will certainly not be used regularly in gangland crimes. We are talking about a rifle weighing 30 lb, which will cost £3,000 or £4,000. The Minister is well aware of some of the historic issues that have arisen in Northern Ireland when paramilitaries have had access to such weapons, but they were never legally held, they were never on a

firearms certificate, and they are not what we should be considering today. We are talking about the lawful pursuit of interest in a sport. That is something that we should support, something that forms part of our Olympics set-up, and something that we, as a country, fund participants to engage in, be involved in, and represent our country in. My hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) knows David Calvert very well. Calvert is a Commonwealth Games and Olympics shooter and gold medallist from Northern Ireland, who excels in the sport.

As a Parliament, we want our society to be safe. As a Parliament, we recognise that regulation is necessary. As a Parliament, we recognise that we should take steps to ensure that anyone who has access to something that is potentially lethal is controlled and monitored, and that there are systems in place to ensure that it is as safe as it can possibly be. However, in the absence of any rationale or evidence to justify this change, I think that it is a step too far.

I welcome the Minister's willingness to engage with the issue, and I welcomed the Secretary of State's indication at the start of the debate that he would engage in thoughtful consideration in the weeks ahead. I look forward to playing whatever part I can on the periphery of the Committee to help to improve the Bill.

6.38 pm

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): This has been a wide-ranging and, on the whole, thoughtful debate. There is agreement across the House on the broad themes of the Bill: the prohibition of the sale of corrosive substances to under-18s and the prohibition of the dispatch of bladed products and corrosive substances to residential addresses. I think it right that the Government are tackling the issue of online sales, and, more generally, the sale and possession of acid and knives. We want to ensure that death stars and zombie knives, which have no purpose other than to cause harm, are no longer a problem on our streets.

I counted no fewer than 20 Back-Bench speeches today. I pay particular tribute to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who focused on corrosive substances and referred to the 85 attacks that had taken place in Newham. She rightly drew attention to the physical and emotional impact of such attacks on victims. She spoke with her usual knowledge and passion, and I pay tribute to her for her sustained campaigning on this issue.

I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) for his speech. He focused on corrosive substances, and brought his technical knowledge to bear on his analysis of the Bill and set out a number of useful suggestions that I hope will be taken into account as the Bill moves into Committee, not least the fact that the Home Office does not collect national statistics on acid attacks, and it would be very useful if it chose to do so. It is important—my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) the shadow policing Minister made this point in her opening remarks—to review the list of substances that require a licence for purchase, because that will surely evolve in the months and years to come. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham drew attention to the fact that police cuts have absolutely had consequences that should be acknowledged.

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

I pay tribute to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson), who said that it was essential that we protect shop workers, who are on the very frontline of the sale of some of these products. I thank the Home Secretary for his positive reaction to that intervention, and I hope that that will be looked at in Committee.

While we welcome the broad thrust of the Bill, it is of course on its own not enough; we need to look at this issue in a broader context. I have said previously in the House that adequate resourcing on its own is not sufficient, but it certainly is necessary. Ministers must acknowledge that it cannot be said that police numbers are irrelevant. We have seen that in a leaked Home Office document—we know that that is the advice that has been given—which says:

“Since 2012-13, weighted crime demand on the police has risen, largely due to growth in recorded sex offences. At the same time officers’ numbers have fallen by 5% since 2014.

So resources dedicated to serious violence have come under pressure and charge rates have dropped. This may have encouraged offenders.”

That is the advice Ministers have been given. I know they say that they never comment on leaks, but if they have not seen this document they should be asking for it, and they should come clean on the impact that the cuts to our police have had on the rise in serious and violent crime. It is not only the 21,000 fewer police officers that have had an impact—so have the 18,000 fewer support staff and the 6,800 fewer community support officers.

I also draw attention to the wider austerity context, and the impact that has had across our public services, not least on youth services in England. There has been a substantial reduction in the number of youth workers, which has clearly had an impact on our young people. Work needs to be done across government to look at whether those leaving care, as well as those who are homeless and those who are excluded from school, receive appropriate support. It is a great shame that central Government funding for youth offending teams has been reduced from £145 million in 2010-11 to just £72 million in 2017-18. That clearly has an impact on the ability of our young people to make a new life for themselves and move away from a potential life of offending.

A number of the contributions across the House made it clear that multi-agency working is important, and it absolutely is, but multi-agency working can only be effective if all those agencies are properly funded and resourced. They can all make a contribution to what is a much broader problem in this context.

We must not forget the situation in which this debate takes place, because there are some sobering statistics on violent crime in our country. The number of violent offences is now more than 1.3 million, compared with just 709,000 in 2009. There were nearly 40,000 offences involving a knife or a sharp instrument in the year ending December 2017. That is a 22% increase on the previous year. There were well over 6,500 firearms offences last year—an 11% increase on the previous year. All those statistics give greater urgency to the need for the House to act, and yes, the Bill is certainly part of that. We have made it absolutely clear that the tightening

of the law in respect of acid and knives is welcome, but if the Government were to simply stop here and assume that the Bill will do everything, I fear that they would be mistaken.

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham described speaking to someone in his constituency, and he made it absolutely clear that this issue should be looked at in a broader context. Unless, together with the Bill, there is serious funding for the agencies that provide the necessary support to our young people and people right across our society, this legislation will not be as effective as it needs to be. Above all, we must think now about all those people who have been injured and had their lives adversely affected by the terrible attacks on our streets. The debate today has on the whole been positive, and it has recognised what people have gone through. Let us now take the Bill into Committee and provide improvements where needed to ensure that it is effective, and that it is matched by the necessary resources.

6.46 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins):** I am grateful to all hon. and right hon. Members across the House for their contributions to the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) said that this had been a constructive and thoughtful debate—that is sadly too rare in this House—and I agree with him. Colleagues have made considered contributions, and it is clear that there is much common ground between us. The fact is that we all want this violent crime to stop, and the Bill is a tool with which the Government, and I hope Members across the House, are trying to tackle this serious issue.

It is apparent that everyone is committed to tackling violent crime head on, and rightly so. Recorded knife and gun crimes are on the increase, and hon. Members will know the devastating impact that those crimes have on communities across the country, not just in London. Before I go on to deal with the Bill, it is worth reflecting on why the legislation is necessary. From the teenage son stabbed to death outside a shop in Camden and the 15-year-old killed in Romford at the weekend to the man in Liverpool whose arm was severed by a machete in a county lines punishment and the fatal stabbings in Wolverhampton, and Sheffield—all those crimes and many more in every part of the country have left behind them grieving families and devastated communities. I consider meeting the victims and the grieving families of these terrible crimes to be one of the most important parts of my role. It is an essential part of my job, and that is why, when I stand here at the Dispatch Box, I speak not just from my notes but from the heart. It is for those people that I am helping the Government to take this legislation through.

We are clear that this is just a part of our strategy to tackle serious violence. We published the serious violence strategy in April, and its emphasis is on the themes that we have heard so much about today. It is about early intervention, about prevention and about the community drawing together and relying on local partners, as my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) said. It is about us working together and seeing this not just as a law enforcement issue, important though that is, but as a societal issue as well. The measures in the Bill will strengthen the powers available to the police to

deal with such crimes. When a family has suffered a terrible crime, they want to feel that the police have the powers they need to bring the offenders to justice. The measures will not solve all crimes involving knives, guns and corrosives, but they are important. We must pursue and prosecute those who commit violent crimes. The Bill gives the police and others the powers they need to do so.

The corrosives measures in the Bill will help to stop young people getting hold of dangerous corrosives and are supported by interested businesses. They build on the voluntary arrangements already in place and will close down the sale of acids to under-18s, both online and offline. The Bill also creates an offence of possession of a corrosive in a public place so that police can take additional action to prevent acid attacks. We know that gang members decant corrosive substances into water bottles to evade detection. This measure gives the police the powers they need.

Other measures will help to stop young people getting hold of knives online. That is a major concern of the communities and charities we have worked with in drawing together the serious violence strategy. We know that such sales have led to knives being used in crime. I have seen some of the knives on sale online. As colleagues on both sides of the House have said, they have no practical use; they are clearly designed to glamorise violence and encourage criminality, and are promoted as such.

**Mr John Hayes:** My hon. Friend is right about the sale on the internet of those weapons, but the internet has other malevolent influences on young people. Several hon. Members raised the issue of social media and its glamorisation of violence. Will she work with others to clamp down on those people who allow those images and messages to be broadcast to vulnerable young people?

**Victoria Atkins:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, not just for the concise and clear points he made in his contribution but for the poetry that he always brings to our debates.

My hon. Friends the Members for Solihull and for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) also made the point about social media. That is why the Home Office serious violence strategy is funding the social media hub pilot, which will give the Metropolitan police the powers they need to work with social media companies to bring those videos down. I have seen drill videos; they are horrific and they need to stop.

The measures on the possession of offensive weapons give the police the powers they need to act when people have flick knives, zombie knives and other offensive weapons that have absolutely no place in our homes.

A number of colleagues mentioned clause 28, which is on high-energy rifles. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said at the start of the debate that we will listen to colleagues' concerns. I reiterate that this is not an attack on rural sports; it is a response to the threat assessment of the National Crime Agency and the police.

Given the strong concerns expressed, I will take a moment to explain how clause 28 came into being. For those who are not familiar with such weapons, they are

very large and heavy firearms that can shoot very large distances. One example I have been given is that they can shoot the distance between London Bridge and Trafalgar Square—some 3,500 metres. I can share with the House the fact that there has been a recent increase in seizures at the United Kingdom border of higher-powered weaponry and ordnance. The assessment is that those weapons were destined for the criminal marketplace, and that the criminal marketplace is showing a growing demand for more powerful weaponry.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** Will my hon. Friend take an intervention?

**Victoria Atkins:** I will finish my point if I may.

That is the background against which we are operating. Having received such an assessment, we must consider it with great care. We have a duty to consider it and to protect the public. I gently correct the suggestion that such high-energy rifles have not been used in crime. As the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) said, high-energy rifles were used in the 1990s during the troubles to kill people who were charged with securing Northern Ireland. We are listening, and, as I hope colleagues saw, I sat through the vast majority of the debate. Those and other issues will be addressed in the conversations that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and all the ministerial team will have with colleagues on both sides of the House.

I must pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), who has devoted a great deal of time and energy not just to the Bill but to protecting our young people and tackling serious violence.

**Theresa Villiers:** Will the Minister acknowledge that, even assuming the Bill makes it to the statute book, we will not tackle this problem unless the Mayor of London and other police and crime commissioners take it very seriously and ensure that they hold their police to account, set objectives for them and ensure that they deliver on this crucial work, as they did when my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) successfully got crime levels down?

**Victoria Atkins:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Indeed she and my hon. Friends the Members for Hinchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), for Hendon (Dr Offord) and for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) all focused on the importance of local policing and local leadership in policing. We introduced police and crime commissioners to enable local people to have the power to influence policing in their local area. Of course, I very much enjoy working with the Mayor of London and, as far as we are concerned, more power to his elbow when it comes to local policing.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend will have heard the widespread concern in many different parts of the United Kingdom. She seems to want to ban these big-calibre weapons solely on the basis that they might get into the hands of a criminal or a terrorist. If that is the case, rather than ban them why does she not adopt my suggestion of improving the secure places where such weapons have to be held? There should be all the security, with the weapons checked in and out, to make stealing them much more difficult.

**Victoria Atkins:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention and for his contribution. He and I have been in constant conversation about this for some time. He will forgive me for not committing to changing the Bill on the Floor of the House, but we are in listening mode. Indeed, I was in listening mode when my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) made a typically robust but thoughtful contribution, and it may be that we work together on looking into that.

**Lyn Brown:** I urge the hon. Lady to be firm on the issue of guns and gun control. She is loquacious on being in listening mode, so will she answer my question on scheduling? She has only a couple of minutes left, and I hope she will get to it.

**Victoria Atkins:** That is literally the next thing on my to-do list. The hon. Lady and the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) are both relentless campaigners on corrosive substances, and I have taken on board her point about adults supplying corrosive substances to children. I will look into it, and perhaps there are already laws to cover it.

The substances in schedule 1 have been included on the basis of recommendations provided by our scientific advisers at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, which provides science and technology advice to the Government. We have tried to ensure that Parliament can scrutinise the list, which is why it is in the Bill, but there is of course capacity to change and add to the schedule through regulation.

I am cantering through, but I am grateful for the contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), who brought his mental health expertise to the Chamber and showed the complexity of the issues we face, and of the right hon. Member for East Ham—I know he is interested in banning sales to under-21s, but we do not feel we have the mechanisms to do that.

I am grateful to all colleagues who have emphasised that this is not just an urban issue but a rural issue, too. There is real intent on both sides of the House to deal with this, and I note that colleagues believe social media and internet companies should join us in our determination. That message is coming out loud and clear from this Government, and I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

#### **OFFENSIVE WEAPONS BILL (PROGRAMME)**

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Offensive Weapons Bill:

##### *Committal*

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

*Proceedings in Public Bill Committee*

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 13 September 2018.

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

#### *Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading*

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

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

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

##### *Other proceedings*

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—*(Kelly Tolhurst.)*

*Question agreed to.*

#### **OFFENSIVE WEAPONS BILL (MONEY)**

*Queen's recommendation signified.*

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

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Offensive Weapons Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of compensation in respect of surrendered weapons, firearms and ancillary equipment.—*(Kelly Tolhurst.)*

*Question agreed to.*

**Mr Speaker:** Before I proceed to the next business, I have now to announce a correction to the result of today's deferred Division. There must have been a miscount by those who attend to these matters. In respect of the Question relating to healthcare and associated professionals, the Ayes were 465, not 467, and the Noes were 2, so the Ayes have it.

#### **Business without Debate**

#### **SELECT COMMITTEE PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE (EFFECTIVE WORKING)**

*Motion made,*

That this House approves the recommendations of the Liaison Committee in its First Report of 2017-19 (HC 922); and accordingly orders that:

(1) Standing Order No. 137A be amended by adding the following sub-paragraph to paragraph (1): “(e) to invite members of any other committee to which this order applies to attend any meeting and, at the discretion of the chair, ask questions of witnesses or otherwise participate in its proceedings; but no member of another committee so invited may move any motion or amendment, vote or count towards the quorum.”; and

(2) until the end of this Session, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 125 (Select committees (admission of the public)), the chair of a select committee may, with leave of that committee, be accompanied at meetings other than oral evidence sessions by a single, nominated member of his or her personal staff, subject to any further conditions set from time to time by any resolution of the Liaison Committee; and those conditions must include provision for the exclusion of any such person if any member of that committee indicates objection at any time.—*(Kelly Tolhurst.)*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

**Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I hope you can provide some guidance on how the record might be corrected in relation to remarks made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North

(Kirsty Blackman) a short while ago in a Westminster Hall debate on coastal erosion. The hon. Lady said that my local authority, Angus Council, had not committed to use the full funding provided for the purpose of protecting against coastal erosion, and she went on to make a series of disparaging connected remarks. Angus Council has now written to the hon. Lady to inform her that those remarks were wrong and that it has in fact committed all the moneys it has received from the Scottish Government's capital funding to flood-risk management actions. The council has requested an explanation as to her remarks, but could you, Mr Speaker, advise me as to how the record can be corrected in this place?

**Mr Speaker:** Well, as I think the puckish grin on the hon. Lady's face testifies, she realises that she has found her own salvation: she has in her own terms corrected the record in respect of those important matters. I detect a glow of contentment on her part, as she has achieved her objective by the tried and tested ruse of an entirely bogus point of order. I hope that satisfies her for now.

## Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust: Governance

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

7.3 pm

**Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): At the beginning of this year, it was announced that the chair of the Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Ian Johnson, would be stepping down at Easter. I had always found him approachable and helpful in my regular meetings with him to discuss the trust's work. For the avoidance of doubt, I should say that although the trust is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), who is sitting on the Government Front Bench, it covers not just my constituency and his, but those of the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies), the right hon. Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) and my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith).

When it was subsequently announced that Mr Johnson had applied to become chair of the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Foundation Trust, I was mildly surprised, but thought nothing more of it. I was then interested, as I am sure others were—this was sent to myself and neighbouring MPs—to receive an email from the secretary of the trust encouraging us to go forward and talk about the process for Mr Johnson's successor. I had no inkling then of the sequence of events that would lead me to seek this Adjournment debate.

What started to concern me about the circulation of this information was the extraordinarily short period of time that we were given. I did write to the secretary of the trust to ask why we had not been given earlier notice of the facts. When I found out that the advertisement had been placed in *The Times*, the date for the application was 16 April, which was within a very short period of time. I said that I would like more details on the shortlisting, the interviews and the interviewing panel. I said that I was sure that the trust would understand how important it was that there should be a strong transparency in the trust at such a critical point at this time. I got a slightly thin but soothing note from Michael Hearty, a governor of the trust, who announced himself as the chair of the nominations committee. He said:

“Let me first of all reassure you about the openness and transparency of the current Chair recruitment process.”

He took me through the process, and he did indeed confirm that it would be very speedy. He said that a long list of candidates had been presented to the nominations committee, but the list was not actually very long. It was a list of only eight, which makes me wonder why all the candidates were not interviewed.

There was then a very short process of presentations to stakeholders and final interviews. I wrote back to the governor and said that I thought there were still “serious questions” to be answered, particularly about the fact that there was no information about the closing date for applications. I asked him whether he would list the members of the nominations committee, and said that I was concerned that it had taken a week to provide me with merely a basic timeline regarding some of the questions that I had asked.

[Gordon Marsden]

The second letter that I received from the governor was written in a rather smooth but slightly condescending fashion. He said:

“I am disappointed that my original response did not provide you with all the assurances that you were seeking and, as a consequence, you have found the need to ask further questions.”

As for the advertising of the process, he said that it was the first time that the trust had taken such a step, and that, in view of the progression, it thought that it would be open and transparent to let people know about it. He said:

“I am sure you will recognise its circulation as a well-intentioned act”,

although the closing date was an obvious piece of detail that could have been included in the original email.

At this point, I began to think of the old proverb that says:

“The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons.”

I said to the governor in response that I did not think that this was very transparent. I asked him who had appointed the nominations committee, and he told me that it was appointed by the governors. I am still at a loss to understand why the shortlisting involved such a hurry.

The other thing that bothered me was the inclusion of the chief executive of the trust, Wendy Swift, on the nominations committee. I laid out my concerns in an email to fellow MPs that I sent to them on 16 May, in which I said:

“the inclusion of the Chief Executive on that Committee, which effectively has overseen all aspects of this process, has prepared the short list of candidates and will presumably make a recommendation to Governors this Friday. I believe that to give any Chief Executive so prominent a role overseeing that process, as opposed to that person perfectly reasonably but separately giving thoughts and feedback to it, could be seen as anomalous in the context of the necessary future relationship of the new Chair to the Chief Exec.

I said that I had

“taken these steps to question what has gone on (with some reluctance and I think for the first time in my 20-years relationship with the Trust)”

because of my real concerns for the procedure, not for the individuals, because at that stage neither I nor anybody else knew who had applied or been shortlisted.

I then looked at the constitution of the trust and the manual of the council of governors. That manual made it very clear that the chief executive was not automatically one of the members of the committee. The role of the council of governors is, of course, to hold the executive to account, so the chief executive could have acted in an advisory capacity, but not as a member. The trust's constitution said that she should be a member, so both of them could not be correct.

I wrote again to Mr Hearty on 17 May and said that the council of governors is

“responsible for establishing the Nominations Committee”.

I said that it is very clear that the chair's appointment is its responsibility and that

“the only reference to the Chief Executive occurs in the section on Attendance at the Nominations Committee...It does not give any licence to the Chief Executive to sit as a fully-fledged member...determining all the processes, shortlisting candidates”

and so on. I asked him therefore to think very carefully as to whether this process should be “paused and recalibrated” because I believed that there was a significant danger that the clear protocols in the governors' manual had been breached.

Well, he did not do that. In fact, an email was then sent by Sue Crouch, the lead governor, saying that although the constitution clearly indicated that the chief executive should be a member of the nominations committee, given the feedback from governors, Wendy had graciously offered to withdraw in the best interest of the process. But, of course, by that time she had taken part in three quarters of the process, and whether it was a gracious withdrawal or otherwise, I have no knowledge. That was not a very good situation.

I had become concerned about the situation with the trust and had therefore written to NHS Improvement to ask the same sorts of questions on what its role should be. I initially got back a letter from the director for the north region, Lyn Simpson, who said that NHS Improvement is not involved in the recruitment of chairs of foundation trusts, which, of course, was not what I had asked her. She said that the trust had given its assurances that this recruitment process was in line with the constitution, as well as open, transparent and governor-led, but she did not give any grounds for that advice.

I went back to Lyn Simpson, reminding her that I had had guidance from the House of Commons Library that foundation trusts are accountable to Monitor, which is now part of NHS Improvement. I had looked at the code of governance published by Monitor, which specifically referred to the appointment of chair, so I asked her to respond more fully. She did respond again, but said that there was no legal basis on which NHS Improvement could intervene in the appointment of a foundation trust chair. I did not find that very acceptable, but I did note that she said that Dr Kirkup's recent governance report, published in February 2018, had highlighted the role that NHS Improvement plays in board appointments as “not sufficiently clear.”

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Quite clearly, if procedure has not been followed, as the hon. Gentleman has outlined, surely at some stage he has to refer this case to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. That must be a way of getting action given that this procedure has not been followed.

**Gordon Marsden:** It might be, but I am hoping that the Minister might be able to make some comments on these issues today, because NHS Improvement has to fulfil its duties under legislation, and I do not believe that it has done that very well.

I received another letter expressing pleasure that the trust had responded positively with the concerns on the point that I had raised, but that was really a question of shutting the door after the horse had bolted, for the reasons that I have explained. I then wrote again, asking for a response from Mr Hearty. I did not get that, but I did get a reply from Sue Crouch, who told me about the meeting to confirm the candidate who was going to be presented. That candidate turned out to be Mr Pearse Butler, who coincidentally had just stepped down as chair of the Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, to which the former chair of the Blackpool trust was about to go. I finally got to see the minutes of the

process, and I was told that the discussion panels had worked well but that there had been a difference of opinion about the candidates.

I was also then told by a number of people that the proceedings at the confirmation were rather irregular. According to governors, not only did Michael Hearty ignore the request from three governors for a secret vote, but he said that abstentions would count as a yes vote, which struck me as a rather strange position. For obvious reasons, and because the trust has larded around a lot of “confidentials” and “highly confidentials” on various things, I am not going to name the governors who have spoken to me, although they are perfectly prepared to talk to people about it. I will just quote what one governor said:

“A few governors, including the Chief executive were involved in the recruitment process. The rest of the Governors were asked to attend presentations and panels as part of the recruitment process. I requested, on a number of occasions, the criteria and weighting for the presentations and the panels, including set questions. These were not sent. At the presentations, pieces of paper were presented on which we could make unstructured comments. These were supposed to be weighted, however there was no...criteria to do so...Candidate were questioned at each panel. No questions were pre set in advance...We were asked to choose a candidate based on the activities. There was disagreement from a number of people...about the preferred candidate for Chair...At the council of governors meeting called to ratify the appointment there was discussion about the process and the selection. A paper ballot was refused and a show of hands insisted on.”

I have a further comment from someone who will again remain nameless, but was a senior manager at Blackpool Vic and in other organisations in the past. He wrote to me to say that the council of governors had always been viewed as an inconvenient necessity rather than a valued part of the trust governance arrangement. I found that very disturbing and concerning.

One might have thought at that stage that the trust, and certainly the nominations committee, would have paused for thought, given all these criticisms from the governors, but we have had the same process for the appointment of a new non-executive director, not the clinical director. Again, there were two panels of candidates, who again included the chief executive, Wendy Swift. I understand that the chair-designate was present on this occasion as well. Let us call the two candidates X and Y. Panel 1 had preferred candidate X by four votes to two, and panel 2 had gone for the same candidate unanimously, but the nominations committee had recommended candidate Y. It is not surprising, therefore, that many trust governors have so far not gone back to ratify this appointment in any shape or form.

Those are some of the issues that have come out of this, and I want to make one or two observations in conclusion. The chair of any health trust is crucial, particularly in the difficult circumstances in which the Blackpool trust finds itself: still requiring improvement, according to the Care Quality Commission, and hit hard by the strains of morbidity and the impacts of transience and demography, which put extra pressure on. We therefore need the process for the appointment of a chair or non-executive director to be as transparent and reaching-out as possible, not a cosy old pals act reinforced by groupthink. That is what has sometimes come up through the bureaucracy.

I am forced to conclude that the nominations committee thought that it could get away with evading proper scrutiny and transparency—that a thin veneer of irritated

politeness attempting to conceal a determined effort to override public governors unless they were rubber-stamped, and indeed delaying so as to block out others such as myself from discussing these things, would do the trick. Well, it does not do the trick, and it is frankly an insult to all the hard-working staff who have worked their socks off in the past few months in recent crises at Blackpool Victoria Hospital.

The use of the words “confidential” and “highly confidential” by the lead governor, Sue Crouch, could be seen as an attempt to intimidate or gag governors who had legitimate concerns about the process. I am very concerned about that. As I say, I have circulated this letter to all my neighbouring MPs. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) is unable to be here today, but she asked specifically for me to indicate that she shares my concern about the governance of the hospital. I understand that the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies), who is also away from Parliament, has said that he has a number of issues with the governance.

I ask the Minister to reflect on whether we need some form of inquiry into the process that went on at the Blackpool trust. I can assure him that some of the governors who have shared the concerns that I have are prepared to give evidence on that. We need some clarity as to the role of NHS Improvement, because it is supposed to be a backstop to addressing both stakeholder and individual concerns, but in this instance it seemed all too ready to accept the version of events from the people who had convened all this and the way they wanted it to go.

The principle that governors should not feel pressured or fettered is very important. If the Government want to encourage democratic involvement in the NHS—a real people’s NHS in its 70th year—there is a lot more to do to support and enable people to secure those rights of representation. Members of Parliament who raise legitimate issues of transparency should be able to get proper answers.

I have no idea whether Mr Pearse Butler, who was announced as the new chair on 18 May, will be a good, bad or indifferent chair of the trust, but I am clear that the process by which he was appointed was deeply flawed and not transparent.

7.19 pm

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay):** May I begin by thanking the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) for securing the debate? I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) in his place, and I know that both my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) and the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) have expressed an interest in the issue.

The issues raised by the hon. Member for Blackpool South are clearly a cause for concern. While the CQC has not identified any governance issues in the trust, it is clear that the recruitment process for the new chair had a number of irregularities. One of the defining features of our approach to the NHS since the Francis report has been a willingness to face up to difficult issues. I therefore welcome the opportunity to focus on these irregularities and will address each in turn.

[Stephen Barclay]

The previous chair of the trust resigned in January 2018 to take up the role of chair in another, nearby foundation trust, University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay. That caused a recruitment process for the chair of Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to commence in February this year. Autonomy in appointing executives is an important NHS foundation trust freedom. As a foundation trust, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has the freedom to determine many of its own policies and procedures, including those relating to the appointment of a new chair.

The process followed by Blackpool is explained in the trust's own constitution, which sets out the make-up of the nominations committee responsible for senior appointments. That committee is made up of six individuals, including the chair, or another senior role if the chair is the position being recruited for, as well as three governors and the chief executive. The sixth member is an independent assessor—in this case, the chair from another foundation trust, Salford Royal.

This is where the first irregularity arises. NHS Improvement guidance states that a foundation trust's chief executive should not be permitted to vote on the appointment of the chair to whom he or she will be accountable. However, in this case, the chief executive was on the nominations committee for this role. While she did not breach the guidance, it is clear to me that if a chief executive should not vote on the appointment of the chair, it follows that a chief executive should also not be involved earlier in the appointments process, given the relationship of accountability that exists between chief executives and chairs of NHS trusts and foundation trusts.

However, I recognise that that instruction was deep within guidance dating from 2012, and there have been other pieces of NHSI guidance for foundation trusts regarding their governance arrangements that did not contain similar advice. There is an expectation that advice and guidance given to NHS trusts is clear and understandable. I have been informed that guidance on this topic is being refreshed by NHSI as part of the review of NHSI's role in board appointments following Dr Kirkup's findings in relation to Liverpool Community Health NHS Trust, to which the hon. Member for Blackpool South referred, and I have asked for the lessons learned to be fed into that refresh.

The chief executive did voluntarily stand back from the process after concerns were raised by the hon. Gentleman regarding her involvement. That was before the final interview was held for any of the candidates. Though it might be fair to ask whether involving the chief executive in the recruitment of the chair was the wisest course of action, it was within the trust's constitution.

The second irregularity is the response from NHSI to the hon. Gentleman's letter of 3 May, which fails to refer to its own guidance regarding the need to ensure that the chief executive is not permitted to vote on the appointment of a chair to whom he or she will be accountable. That is regrettable, and I understand that NHSI will write again to him to apologise for that error.

The third irregularity highlighted is the speed of the process. The nominations committee engaged recruitment consultants GatenbySanderson to provide professional services during the recruitment process. Part of that process involved emailing local MPs to inform them

that the recruitment process was taking place. However, as the hon. Gentleman has highlighted, there was little time between that email being sent and the closing date for applications—10 working days over the Easter holiday period. The email did not include the closing date for applications, further hampering MPs' ability to contribute effectively to the process.

I understand that the recruitment process began in February and concluded in May, with the new chair in post from 1 June. The recruitment company has confirmed that this process was run to a standard timeframe. That raises the question of why the local engagement, an important part of the overall appointments process, appears to have been rushed in this instance. There are clearly lessons to be learned, and I will be working with NHSI to ensure that its guidance is refreshed, and that it is clear in its advice to foundation trusts and trusts about the importance of local engagement.

The hon. Gentleman's letter to the trust of 17 May referenced the trust's council manual, pointing out that it did not include any reference to the chief executive sitting on the nominations panel. This document sits under the constitution of the trust, and I am satisfied that the explicit rules addressing this matter in the constitution have been followed. I have today received a personal assurance from the trust chief executive, Wendy Swift, that the trust will review its constitution to remove any ambiguity in respect of the appointment of the chair and non-executive directors.

Just to reassure the hon. Gentleman, I will read directly from that letter to me:

"I would like to reassure you that we had already taken a decision to review our Constitution to remove any ambiguity in respect of the appointment of the Chair and Non-Executive Directors."

I will happily share that letter with the hon. Gentleman.

The independent assessor on the panel was the chair of Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust. He agreed as to the candidate recommended by the nominations committee's interview panel to the council of governors, and has not raised objections about how the process to recruit the new chair was run. I have had a personal assurance from the chief executive that there has been no contact between her and the chair of Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, and that she has not in any way tried to influence the decision-making process leading to the chair's appointment.

The chief executive's letter to me, dated 27 June—it might be helpful to the House if I quote it—goes on:

"I did know the new Chair on a professional basis prior to his appointment. We have worked within the same Health Economy for a number of years and attended the same strategic meetings and events. For clarity, the Chair was the Chief Executive of the Strategic Health Authority (2002-2006) whilst I was the Chief Executive of Blackpool PCT. After 2006, there were no personal or professional links until the Chair was appointed as the Chair of the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS FT (2014-2018)."

It is clearly difficult to reconcile the involvement of chief executives in the process of selecting chairs with principles of good governance. This appointment took place under the system of foundation trust autonomy put in place under successive Governments, and is a matter for the foundation trusts themselves. However, NHSI recognises that the role it plays in board appointments, both executive and non-executive, is not sufficiently clear and that there would be benefit in reviewing and codifying its oversight and support arrangements.

While any such changes should pay due regard to the fact that autonomy in appointing executives is an important NHS foundation trust freedom, I assure the House that I will be working with NHSI to ensure that the irregularities regarding this appointment do not occur in the future.

The hon. Gentleman has done the House a service in highlighting the clear irregularities in respect of this

appointment. I hope that my response goes some way to reassuring him that NHSI will work with the Department to ensure that further irregularities do not occur.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.29 pm

*House adjourned.*

## Deferred Division

### HEALTHCARE AND ASSOCIATED PROFESSIONS

That the draft Nursing and Midwifery (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 17 May, be approved.

*The House divided: Ayes 465, Noes 2.*

### Division No. 197]

#### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amesbury, Mike  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Argar, Edward  
 Ashworth, Jonathan  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Austin, Ian  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Benyon, rh Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, Suella  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Brown, Lyn  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burns, Conor  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Carden, Dan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chapman, Jenny  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, Colin  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Clwyd, rh Ann  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Nic  
 Davey, rh Sir Edward  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Ms Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drew, Dr David  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain

Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellman, Dame Louise  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Chris  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Farron, Tim  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freer, Mike  
 Frith, James  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Garnier, Mark  
 George, Ruth  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Girvan, Paul  
 Glen, John  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Green, Kate  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Grogan, John  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hair, Kirstene  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy

Hart, Simon  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jack, Mr Alister  
 James, Margot  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Karen  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 Lloyd, Tony

Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, John  
 Mann, Scott  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Masterton, Paul  
 Matheson, Christian  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert

Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Onasanya, Fiona  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Owen, Albert  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, rh Claire  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Raab, Dominic  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees, Christina  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas

Rowley, Danielle  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr  
 Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smith, Royston  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo

Syms, Sir Robert  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Twist, Liz  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Western, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr  
 John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zahawi, Nadhim  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**NOES**

Cable, rh Sir Vince

Godsiff, Mr Roger

*Question accordingly agreed to.*



# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 27 June 2018*

[DAVID HANSON *in the Chair*]

## Healthcare on English Islands

9.30 am

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the provision of healthcare on English islands.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I thank the Speaker's Office for granting this debate and the Minister for coming to respond to it.

I will outline three arguments. First, I will explain why I believe Isle of Wight health services remain underfunded compared with the mainland. My trust believes that that underfunding ranges from £5 million to £8 million just for acute services. Secondly, I will ask why the Isle of Wight is the only UK island, separated by sea, without NHS-subsidised travel. I believe that is deeply unfair to my constituents. Thirdly, I will suggest ways in which we can help both the Department of Health and Social Care to deliver better health and social care on the Island through the creation of a single public services authority for local government and health, and the Island to become a national leader, as it has done in the past, in improving Government services by combining them.

By way of background, I start by paying tribute to the Island's NHS staff, who do a wonderful job delivering NHS healthcare provision. We greatly value their professionalism and dedication. I also acknowledge the work of the Island's NHS leadership in the clinical commissioning group and the trust, and the work of Maggie Oldham and Vaughan Thomas specifically. Along with their wider teams, they do a challenging job in difficult circumstances, and I am hugely grateful for their work and that of everybody in the health services, including medics and ambulance staff, and our public services.

I have called this debate both as Member for the Isle of Wight and as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for UK islands. The purpose of the APPG is to promote the needs of island communities within Great Britain and Northern Ireland and to advocate for their economic and social wellbeing, the provision of high-quality, accessible public services, and affordable transport arrangements, which are particularly pertinent to the Island I have the privilege of representing. The issues I am raising today focus directly on those matters.

Today's subject follows earlier debates that I or the APPG have called on the economies and public services of UK islands. Due to devolution, this debate is largely focused on English islands, meaning primarily the Isle of Wight, whose population is approximately 140,000, and the much smaller Isles of Scilly, which I believe have a population of about 1,500.

As I have previously raised, there are additional costs associated with providing public services in island communities. The University of Portsmouth has issued a peer-reviewed report showing that the extra costs of

providing local government services on the Isle of Wight are some £6.4 million a year. Coincidentally, that is similar to the amount of money that Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles get, despite having much smaller populations.

Those principles work for healthcare provision as well. I believe there are significant additional costs to providing services on the Isle of Wight. As I have said, we have a population of 143,000. That is half the size of a population that would usually have a district general hospital, so we are very grateful to have such a hospital and its great staff. However, because our helicopters do not fly 24 hours a day and sometimes the ferries do not go at night, the Island needs a maternity unit. Women cannot give birth in a helicopter. We need paediatrics and we need A&E. Our funding is naturally and obviously skewed by our environment, and because of that there is an argument that we are unable to properly fund some of the other services we need.

An additional problem is that if the trust has a full-time consultant on its books and pays them for their expertise while, in effect, using them only three days a week, or if the maternity consultant is not being used to his full capacity because, although we do need a maternity unit, ours is not as active as that of the average district general hospital, those consultants are not getting the required hours on their ticket, to put it in layman's terms. That causes diseconomies of scale. One solution is to work much more closely with Southampton and Portsmouth. That is critical to our future, and it is going to happen.

Our costs are also exacerbated by the demographic profile of Isle of Wight residents. We have a lot of young people, as the Isle of Wight festival proved, but it is also the case that 24% of our population are aged over 65, and that percentage will increase. As the Minister and I discussed before the debate, there is an argument that NHS funding for those over 80 is not generous enough, because of the more focused health requirements of people of those advanced ages. Given that a fair chunk of our population are over 80, we have significant pressures. More than 2,700 residents are living with dementia, which is double the national average per constituency.

We are experiencing a growing financial challenge. Our CCG is £19 million above its target funding. The Island overall receives £233 million to fund its healthcare services. The CCG and the trust are seeking to make £19.1 million savings this year, which will still leave cost pressures. The rise in our funding has been marginal compared with that in trusts and CCGs elsewhere in the UK. Those very small rises in funding are now having a very negative effect, and I would appreciate the Minister looking closely at that.

Financial modelling undertaken as part of the acute services redesign shows that even if services are reconfigured to the maximum extent, there will still be a gap between the costs of funding services for the Island population and the amount of money its NHS receives. Our trust believes that the cost, even under our most ambitious plans, is between £5.3 million and £8 million. That is just for the delivery of acute services, if I understand correctly.

My first suggestion to the Minister is that he accept that there are additional costs associated with providing those services on the Island. This is not a case of special

[Mr Bob Seely]

pleading; it is merely an acceptance that the Island's healthcare structure has exceptional circumstances by dint of being separated from the mainland. The Minister could build us a fixed link, at a cost of about £3 billion, or we can argue about the extra millions needed to properly fund the NHS.

I strongly welcome the Secretary of State's recent announcement of a new long-term funding plan for the NHS, which is a clear sign of our party's commitment to ensuring that the NHS continues its world-class provision—but I want to ensure that some of that funding comes my way. I would be grateful if the Minister would continue that conversation and meet our Island NHS leadership, so that he and his officials can understand the extra costs in detail.

I also want to propose a way that we on the Island can work more effectively with the integration of public services. I hope that idea will be attractive to the Minister and his officials. As I have said, we are not looking for special treatment, but we are looking for fairer funding. I place emphasis on both provision and access because we want to provide as many services as possible on the Island, but we also need access to the mainland for when some of our Islanders need to go to Southampton or Portsmouth for specialist services such as radiotherapy. There will be a small decrease in the number of visits to the mainland, but a small rise in the number of more specialised healthcare appointments there.

As the Minister may know, the NHS trust has laid out a series of options for the future of healthcare on the Isle of Wight. I seek Government support for its more ambitious aim of taking back more bread-and-butter acute services to the Island, thereby requiring fewer trips to the mainland, rather than the current option of slightly fewer services on the Island and slightly more on the mainland. We will discuss that at length.

The local care finance system has undertaken a detailed assessment of how to strike the appropriate balance between providing services within the shores of the Island and enabling access. However, there are increased patient safety risks associated with any shift of more services to the mainland, particularly for patients who may be frail and in need of swift access to services.

My constituents have made it clear, through a range of public engagement exercises, that they wish to see the maximum retention of services on the Island, and they join me in asking the Government to ensure that that is recognised in any future funding. As recently as two weeks ago, the *Isle of Wight County Press* and Isle of Wight Radio hosted a question time event with representatives of the Isle of Wight NHS at which the Island-mainland split in services was debated. My constituents' views were clear: where possible, the retention of services on the Island should be a priority. I therefore urge the Minister to carefully examine the funding arrangements in place for healthcare, to ensure that those needs are met.

I also ask that we examine the issue of patient travel and how visits to the mainland from the Island are funded. As I have said, the Isle of Wight is the only UK island with no subsidised ferry travel to support local residents in accessing specialised services on the mainland.

I will not dwell on arrangements for Scottish islands, because they are part of a wider mechanism and their arrangements are devolved.

The National Health Service (Travel Expenses and Remission of Charges) Regulations 2003 set out that any resident of the Isles of Scilly not entitled to payment in full of NHS travel expenses in accordance with low-income criteria will pay a maximum of £5 for their travel costs. A document from the Cornish CCG, NHS Kernow, also sets out that residents of the Isles of Scilly have to pay only £5 towards the cost of NHS-funded patient transport to the mainland. Furthermore, if it is deemed necessary that the patient needs an escort, a further maximum payment of £5 will be applicable.

I have talked about the matter with my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who represents the Isles of Scilly. I am delighted that residents of the Isles of Scilly benefit from such an arrangement, but why is it not available to my constituents as well? Although some on the Isle of Wight meet the narrow definition of being on a low income and would benefit from having such costs met, many other residents have to regularly access healthcare treatment on the mainland—such as those with prostate cancer, who may need 40 trips—and face difficulty in affording the associated and oft repeated costs. I believe it is inequitable and unfair for one set of English islands to enjoy such a benefit when others do not. It is yet another example of the Isle of Wight's not being treated fairly.

The arrangements for Isle of Wight residents travelling to the mainland for operations and medical appointments are much less generous, and exist only due to the co-operation of our three cross-Solent operators. Red Funnel offers a special return ferry fare; Wightlink offers a discount for both vehicle and foot passengers plus a patient escort; and Hovertravel offers a 20% discount on day returns. I am grateful to those operators for putting those arrangements in place, and to the NHS on the Isle of Wight for negotiating them, but the reality is that even with such discounts, the cost of trips to access healthcare on the mainland can place a great financial burden on patients, which is at odds with the NHS's founding principle of being free at the point of delivery.

I therefore ask the Minister to amend the 2003 regulations to extend that statutory requirement to the Isle of Wight, as well as the Isles of Scilly. That would be a significant step forward and would have a transformational effect on the lives of many of my constituents who go to the mainland for treatment. Around 32,000 return visits are undertaken a year. Under option 3, that would be about 30,000, while under option 4 it would be about 27,000 or 28,000. We are talking about numbers in the low tens of thousands, and funding those visits would require relatively small amounts of money.

However, as those visits are in the tens of thousands, and because our CCG is struggling for money, I ask that any such arrangements do not have a budgetary impact, either on Cornwall's or the Isle of Wight's CCGs, and that the cost of funding the discount comes directly out of the NHS budget. That would be recognition that English islands should be treated similarly to Scottish islands, and of the cost of going to the mainland from the Isles of Scilly or the Isle of Wight. Under this plan, patients and their escorts would pay no more than £5 to travel to the mainland for treatment. I believe that to be

a fair and reasonable gesture for the Government to make, and I ask for that change to be brought forward, along with the changes to the 2003 regulations to allow the Isle of Wight to benefit from statutory obligations.

There is also the issue of travel for families. Staying overnight in a mainland hospital brings about financial pressures for my constituents. I appreciate that the 2003 regulations do not provide for support in these cases, but if the Minister was generous enough to consider those changes, and to find the small amount of money to fund directly the £5 fare for people seeking treatment, my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives and I could go back to the ferry companies serving our respective islands and see if they would be generous enough to make similar provision for patients' visitors. Someone from Ventnor, Cowes or Ryde who was going to hospital in Southampton on the mainland would pay £5 to get to the hospital, but their families often pay full whack on the ferries. That is not cheap. If we changed those arrangements, we could talk to the ferry companies about providing properly recognised and organised support to families visiting their loved ones in hospital. That would be a generous gesture to the Isles of Scilly and the Isle of Wight.

I am grateful to the Minister for listening, and I will raise one other issue. To recap, the Isle of Wight is not properly funded, and my folks—my constituents—are hard done by when traveling to the mainland. Do not get me wrong: we love being an island, but we seek fair funding to mitigate the effect of the Solent, which is often overlooked by the Government. However, I am here not just to ask, but to offer. We on the Island are already committed to integrating health and social care as much as possible, and I believe that Islanders would be delighted, with Government support, to lead the way in delivering best practice in the integration of council, health and adult social care services.

For example, we have the “My Life a Full Life” programme, which is a collaboration between the Isle of Wight CCG, the NHS trust and the Isle of Wight Council. The programme works in partnership with local people, voluntary organisations and the private sector to deliver a more co-ordinated approach to the delivery of health and social care for older people and people with long-term conditions on the Island.

My aim is to keep as many young people on the Island as possible, to build an economy for them, and to get a university and improve our education system. However, at the same time, it is critical that we become a leader in ensuring quality of life in later life. We are naturally drawn towards integrating our services, because we are a small island, so we have the potential to be a national leader in this. “My Life a Full Life” is a great idea, but it arguably has not reached the point that it should, because we still have siloed organisations. There are bureaucratic hurdles to overcome in combining the leadership of those organisations, but ensuring their full integration could save a considerable amount of money on appointments, which could then be put back into frontline services.

I would like to acknowledge the work of all those involved on the Island in delivering some really good programmes that we have for integration, but particularly Councillors David Stewart and Clare Mosdell, along with professional officers such as Dr Carol Tozer, the director of adult social care. They have established a

local care board, and it is already bringing the services together as part of our One Public Service vision for the Island, but it is still not combined structurally and in terms of leadership and governance.

At the moment, the Government provide one pot of money to local government on the Island, another to fund the Isle of Wight NHS, and another to the CCG. Does it have to be that rigid? Can we aspire to a situation in which one combined funding pot is made available for public service provision on the Island, thereby increasing the requirement for deeper and more meaningful integration? Such circumstances may require combining the governance and leadership of public services. It is important to explore that, and there are questions about the role of experts, certainly in healthcare and adult social care provision.

I ask the Minister to explore, with his ministerial colleagues, whether there is an appetite for creating a unique public authority on the Isle of Wight that combines traditional local government functions with those of NHS trusts, the CCG, adult social care, mental health services and so on. If such a fully combined and integrated approach can work anywhere, it should work on the Island. Such a step would be a natural progression from the integrated way in which we are trying to work; we are trying to overcome those siloed, bureaucratic, financial hurdles. Clearly, if we achieved that, we would ensure that the input of healthcare professionals was still very much at the forefront of decision making. I urge the Minister to work with us as closely as possible on that, because that could be a valuable exercise that could be repeated elsewhere, perhaps in more isolated communities, and in places where the combination of healthcare and public service could achieve real public good and address public need.

I will not talk for much longer; I will just make a couple of other points briefly. I am grateful to you, Mr Hanson, for allowing me to speak at length.

I want to talk about digital solutions. Again, we are not the only part of Britain that is isolated, but clearly the Solent is a boundary and border for us. I find the situation slightly ridiculous. Yes, if people need to go to Southampton for an operation, that is great, but do they need to go there for every pre-op appointment? Do they need to go to Southampton or Portsmouth for every post-op appointment? We were talking about this earlier. We need to find the greatest centres of expertise in Britain and be able to buy in those services. Perhaps people can have their appointment in Southampton, Reading, London or Portsmouth, but can have their pre-op using digital technology—telemedicine. We need to be much more efficient in how we use that.

Again, we are not the only isolated part of Britain. However, I am offering the Island to NHS England as a pioneer in not only integrated services, but how we use advances in telemedicine and all those other wonderful things. Also relevant is data collection. The NHS does not use data terribly well, if I understand correctly. In relation to data for preventive medicine, we are small enough to be manageable. Social scientists love us because we are geographically isolated; we are clearly, in a very geographically obvious way, measurable. And for relatively small amounts of money, a great deal of learning could be done on the use of data in relation to preventive medicine, telemedicine and integration—the combining of health and adult social care.

[Mr Bob Seely]

As well as saying, “Please look at our funding”, because we have funding problems on the Island, we have special needs that have never, ever been recognised. I find the situation shocking, frankly. The Government, with the best will in the world, try to be fair. They fund the Scottish islands via the Scottish Government; they give them extra money. Anglesey has a bridge; the Scilly Isles have a small population anyway. However, the Government permanently function without taking into account my constituency. I know that they do not mean to do that, but our circumstances are unique, in that we are isolated by water, and that has never been recognised. When isolation factors are looked at, we never seem to qualify.

We are not properly funded, but we would like to be, and I would like the Government to look seriously at the struggle that some Islanders face in paying for the travel to the mainland when they go for treatment. I am offering the Government suggestions of ways in which the Island could be used as a test case, as a national leader, to integrate services better, to use data better and to combine all these functions, using telemedicine, to create a world-class service on the Island. That could be used not only to deliver great healthcare to my residents, but as a national role model for others.

9.55 am

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) on securing the debate and on his very knowledgeable presentation of his constituents’ concerns and views. It is clear that health services on the Isle of Wight face challenges that, as he eloquently set out, are unique and require a tailored approach. However, there are similarities between the experiences that he reported and people’s experiences with health services throughout England.

When we think of the geography of England, there can be too little appreciation of the fact that England covers just five eighths of Great Britain, and includes more than 100 islands. Those islands are an intrinsic part of our nation, as you will know, Mr Hanson. Not too far from both our constituencies is Hilbre Island, which, although it has no resident population, is an important part of our area’s history and culture. Like Hilbre, the vast majority of islands do not have a permanent population. Most of those that do are connected to the mainland by road—examples are Canvey Island in Essex and Portsea Island in Hampshire—and, as a result, their healthcare services are very integrated with those of the surrounding areas.

As we have heard, however, there are islands, including the Isle of Wight, the Isles of Scilly and Holy Island, that are accessible only by sea and air, and they do not benefit from such ease of access. That poses serious challenges, particularly for the smaller islands, especially in emergencies, which of course cannot be planned for.

Before discussing the points made by the hon. Gentleman about the Isle of Wight, I will touch on the situation on some of the other islands in England. Many do not have their own medical facilities providing emergency care, because of their smaller populations. With the

exception of the Isle of Wight, all our islands are served by NHS organisations based on the mainland. For those with road access, ambulances from the mainland can reach patients without undue difficulty. However, those without access have had to develop local approaches to providing support. Much of that support comes from volunteer community first responders, who reach patients before an ambulance can arrive to provide first aid.

On behalf of the Opposition, I pay tribute to all those who give their time to such services. They provide a vital lifeline in their communities. We do not speak enough about the role that volunteers play in our health service. I have seen for myself during a stint at my local ambulance station how volunteer responders can play an important role in assisting paid professionals. On that occasion, it was in a rural location, but the principles about access and timely intervention also apply there.

I understand that last year a volunteer first responder group was launched on Holy Island, which as we all know is inaccessible at high tide. Supported by the North East Ambulance Service, the group plays an extremely valuable role. There are similar groups across many of our islands.

In the time that I have served on the Front Bench, I have been privileged to visit several air ambulance services. They, too, play an extremely valuable role in providing urgent care in isolated areas. Again, much is down to efforts by volunteers and to fundraising, as they are of course charities. There was a reception at Parliament yesterday for the various regional air ambulances, and I was very pleased to see a great many parliamentarians attend to show their support. It is concerning to consider what the position would be for our island communities if those volunteer organisations were not involved.

Aside from the Isle of Wight, the Isles of Scilly are our most populous islands that can be accessed only by air or sea. Despite five of those islands being inhabited, there is just one minor injuries unit, at St Mary’s, so the island is hugely reliant on the five ambulance all-terrain vehicles that serve the island. Many non-emergency procedures have to take place on the mainland because of the need to access specialised treatment for conditions. The cost of accessing that treatment is usually met by the patient, when they are not in receipt of qualifying benefits. That can cause problems for a number of individuals.

As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight said, for those who live on the Isles of Scilly, a £5 concessionary fare on the Skybus to the mainland is available, but that covers the cost of the journey only from St Mary’s to Land’s End; there is the additional cost of the remainder of the journey. However, that is still a better situation than the hon. Gentleman’s constituents enjoy—or not, as the case may be. It was perfectly reasonable for him to raise that anomaly, which he described as an inequitable situation. He was also right to raise the issue of families travelling to the mainland. It is important that those faced with an extended stay in hospital have the support of family and friends.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight set out three main arguments to show that his constituents are in a different position. He believes that the Isle of Wight is underfunded generally when it comes to health services. He made the point that it is the only English island separated from the mainland by sea that is without any

kind of subsidy for patient travel. He also expressed a desire to integrate public services, particularly health and social care. He raised a point about the extra cost of providing public services on the Island, because of reduced capacity; that was no surprise to hon. Members. He said that services such as A&E and maternity are needed on the Island, because it is not possible to travel to the mainland in every emergency. He set out very well how that sometimes creates diseconomies of scale, and problems that require more working with mainland providers.

The hon. Gentleman made comparisons with the funding increases for other CCGs in recent years. He expressed a desire for his constituency to become a national leader in integrating local services. He will be aware that up and down the country there are a great many plans at various stages of development. It is clear that many communities are heading in the direction of greater integration between health and social care. On that point, I would be grateful if the Minister could indicate in his response whether he believes there is any need for legislation to bolster this development, particularly in terms of safeguards around governance and standards.

Earlier this year, the Labour party conducted a coastal communities consultation, which extended to the islands. The issues we have discussed this morning are exactly the kind of things that a future Labour Government would be keen to look at. We have heard that the Isle of Wight is a unique island in our nation, with such a large population being dependent on ferries to get to the mainland. As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight set out, the Island's unique status has led to a unique response, in terms of the configuration of health services. The Isle of Wight NHS Trust is the only integrated acute, community, mental health and ambulance healthcare provider in England. The hon. Gentleman wants to increase integration further. As we also heard, in addition to the geographical challenges, there are demographic issues on the Isle of Wight. Its proportion of residents aged 80-plus is above the national average. That has an additional impact on health and social care costs. The proportion of patients with dementia is double the national average.

In response to some of the unique challenges the Island is facing, a service reconfiguration is being planned through the Hampshire and Isle of Wight sustainability and transformation partnership. That involves 89% of current hospital-based care remaining on the Island, with 11% of more complex and specialist treatments being provided on the mainland. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman would like as many of those treatments as possible to be dealt with directly on the Island, and for his constituents not to have to travel to the mainland to access them. I appreciate that that will not always be achievable, but I seek the Minister's assurances that he will consider the measures that can be put in place to support those patients who will have to travel, and will often be in a vulnerable condition as a result of that. Will he confirm that the changes proposed are based on clinical, rather than financial, priorities? Will he also confirm that proposals will not lead to a reduction in the overall number of beds on the Isle of Wight? The STP document states:

"There would be no change in capacity at St Mary's until actual changes in activity are put in place".

That suggests that there may be some reduction in bed numbers.

The Isle of Wight NHS Trust was again rated inadequate by the Care Quality Commission as recently as April, and it remains in special measures. No fewer than 233 incidents were reported in which the NHS was found to be failing to meet its obligations to residents of the Island. I would be grateful if the Minister said what he is doing to improve the trust's performance. The report recognised that there were some improvements, although those can never come quickly enough.

Finally, while many of the challenges facing our health service on the islands are unique, there are also many similarities in the challenges we face. One of those similarities is in the financial pressures trusts are facing as a result of the longest and most sustained period of financial constraint the NHS has ever faced. As a result of that, performance has deteriorated. Take the example of the four-hour A&E target, which the Secretary of State described as being critical for safe care. In 2010-11, 99% of patients were seen within four hours on the Isle of Wight, whereas today that figure has fallen to 88%. Some 22% of Isle of Wight cancer patients wait more than two months for treatment, which, again, represents a significant deterioration. That is not uncommon within other parts of the NHS.

The financial challenges faced by the Isle of Wight NHS Trust are deeply concerning, as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight set out, and I believe that they can be directly traced to years of austerity. As we have heard, the trust and the CCG will end the year in a significant deficit. The trust is having to take out more than £1.5 million in loans each month, which will have to be repaid. We have heard reference to the additional funding announcements made by the Prime Minister last week. We should acknowledge that those funding announcements, if they are delivered on, will represent nothing more than a standstill position, rather than an improvement on the current situation. It has also been confirmed that social care, capital spending and public health are excluded from that announcement.

In conclusion, I thank the hon. Member for Isle of Wight for the impressive way he set out the issues facing his constituents, and the unique challenges that face those on the Isle of Wight and our other islands. Giving the NHS the funding that it needs is at the core of all that.

10.8 am

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) for raising the issue in the way that he has. He has used Westminster Hall exactly as it should be used—to bring the concerns of his constituents front and centre before the House. He set out not only the challenges faced, but the ways forward and a number of solutions for different issues. In short, he raised issues of funding that relate to population and geography, travel, the potential for further integration, and also a way forward involving digital and data. I will address each of those in turn.

This is also a timely debate, as the shadow Minister mentioned, following the Prime Minister's announcement at the Royal Free Hospital last week of a significant funding boost to the NHS. Alongside that, NHS leaders are drafting a long-term, 10-year plan on services, which will look at many of the issues he cited in his speech.

[Stephen Barclay]

As we start that journey with NHS leaders, bringing the issues of the Isle of Wight front and centre is timely and helpful.

I would segment the funding formula issue into two: the challenges that the Island has in common with other parts of the country, such as those posed by the over-80s and by the significant number of constituents with dementia, and those that are unique to it. Indeed, few hon. Members feel that their constituents' circumstances do not merit being higher up the funding formula than they currently sit. It is valid to raise those issues, and NHS England will look at them on the advice of the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation, which advises on the funding formula. Those decisions are common to other areas, but they need to be made in respect of the Island. If my hon. Friend wishes, I am happy to facilitate a meeting with NHS England so the funding pressures pertaining to the demography of the Island can be raised. He will recognise that the setting of the funding formula is an independent process.

There are specific issues about the geography that my hon. Friend raised very well, not least about maternity services and paediatrics. The Island needs to supply those services and that will have an impact on its funding. I am happy to look at those issues. Integration is one way that headroom will be facilitated to meet those challenges. As he said, the Island was a vanguard site that has received £8.4 million of extra funding since 2015 to facilitate the transformation of services. That funding recognised some of the Island's specific geographical challenges.

Although geography can be, and is in certain areas, a disadvantage and a driver of cost, it is also a driver of opportunity, as my hon. Friend set out. The Island has a strong sense of place and identity, and there are strong personal links between key decision makers and stakeholders. As the shadow Minister rightly said, the move towards greater integration between health and social care—as is reflected in the name of the Department—is also an opportunity to drive integration between the council and health services. My hon. Friend alluded to the bureaucratic obstacles to that, and I am happy to work with him to overcome them. As patients present with multiple conditions and as we move away from silos of care to a more holistic approach to patients and their wellbeing, the Island offers a huge opportunity for greater integration.

On my hon. Friend's point about data, I had an interesting meeting yesterday with the chief executive of the Christie in Manchester, which is one of our outstanding trusts. I was struck by the fact that 19% of its patients take part in medical research programmes. The chief executive set out how that is hugely beneficial to the trust and to the patients, who get access to cutting-edge drugs and the latest thinking. He has also been able to attract some of the world-leading figures in research because he has a population that researchers can work for, which is very attractive to them. That is a real win-win, and the demographics of the Island offer an opportunity in that regard.

**Mr Seely:** One point that I did not make was that when it comes to looking at dementia, the Island would be very open to becoming a national leader or a place

where academics and researchers could investigate how we can live better with dementia in this country. We have double the national average of people with dementia, so it would be a natural fit for us.

**Stephen Barclay:** I am keen to work with my hon. Friend on that, because the Government have prioritised their research and development budget, as I know from my time at the Treasury. A significant investment has also been made in health R&D. The NHS has an opportunity to combine its patient data with our world-leading universities and R&D to attract researchers, drive forward the most innovative approach on healthcare and translate that cutting-edge research into day-to-day care. That can be a frustration for our constituents; it is fine to have the research, but we need to roll it out to scale in a way that is meaningful for patients. The challenge of the Island's geography is also a huge advantage to it. I do not know what percentage of its patients are taking part in research, but that may be an area for him to explore and for the Department to work with him on.

My hon. Friend also raised the potential of digital. He will be aware that the Secretary of State has asked Dr Eric Topol, one of the world leaders on the use of digital in healthcare, to undertake a report for the Department. My hon. Friend is right that rather than a patient having to be physically present in all instances, as was traditionally the case, there is scope to use digital much more for them to see a consultant online and for information to be sent digitally. I recognise that if the clinical commissioning group is in deficit, finding the headroom to invest in that technology becomes a trade-off and a challenge, but that is one of the opportunities that will be opened up by the Prime Minister's investment in the NHS and it is an area that the 10-year forward view will specifically examine.

In terms of timing, the Island has a chance to look at how it can become a leader, what has been done with digital enablers and early adopters in the NHS, and in which areas it can lead on in technology. I will come on to the challenges of travel, but reducing the need for journeys is a more sustainable solution than seeking to subsidise them. Our starting point should be how we can use technology to reduce the need for as many journeys, rather than how we can subsidise more journeys. That offers significant scope.

On travel, I heard my hon. Friend's remarks about the cost and its wider impact on families. There is a correlation with a separate debate we have had about car parking charges. Clearly, there are specific challenges related to travel, but as he also set out, it is quite complex, because there are already arrangements with the ferry companies and national schemes for subsidies and assistance that can be given to people who are financially challenged. It is a question of looking at how we can fit in with the existing schemes and what agreements can be reached with the companies concerned. I am happy to meet him to pick up on that specific point to better understand our current approach and what can be done, given the challenges. Again, the challenge of distance is not unique to the Island, but as he mentioned, there are certain features of travel to the Isle of Wight and the Scilly Isles that pose challenges.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, the NHS healthcare travel cost scheme provides financial help for travel costs for patients on low incomes who are referred.

The scheme is part of the NHS's low-income scheme, under which people are also entitled to free prescriptions and glasses. Under the scheme, the full cost of transport can be reimbursed by the NHS to eligible patients. Schemes are in place, but I hear the wider points that he has raised and I am happy to discuss them with him.

In short, my hon. Friend has set out that the Isle of Wight is ideally placed to be at the vanguard of the NHS's approach as we move forward with the 10-year forward view, in embracing digital and integration and in looking at how to deliver place-based commissioning most effectively. There are some specific challenges with regard to its population and its geography in terms of travel. The interplay of those two things is another challenge in terms of efficiencies of scale and the services that are considered essential on the Island, which may be dealt with at a larger-population level elsewhere.

In the NHS more widely, as we move to a hub-and-spoke model and to more flexible population sizes, and as we look at place-based commissioning, the Isle of Wight has huge potential to be at the forefront, as my hon. Friend has set out. I am very happy to follow up this debate by meeting my hon. Friend, and to facilitate a discussion between him and NHS England, to ensure that we deliver what he has campaigned passionately for—the best healthcare for residents of the Island—and that the significant investment set out by the Prime Minister is maximised for his constituents.

The shadow Minister quite reasonably asked whether we were open to changes to the legislation. As he will be aware, the Prime Minister said to the NHS leadership in her remarks at the Royal Free Hospital that we are open to such suggestions if NHS leaders feel that changes are necessary. As part of the workings of the long-term plan, those leaders will need to look at what they need, and whether much of the integration—I know that the Mayor of Manchester supports the integration that is taking place in Manchester—can be done under existing legislation, or whether changes are needed, and if so, what those are. That will be part of the discussions with Simon Stevens and others in the weeks and months ahead.

**David Hanson (in the Chair):** The hon. Member for Isle of Wight has the opportunity to make any concluding comments, should he so wish.

10.20 am

**Mr Seely:** Only to thank you for your chairmanship, Mr Hanson, and the Minister, the shadow Minister, and the officials for attending. Thank you so much.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the provision of healthcare on English islands.

10.21 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games: Shooting

11 am

**Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the removal of shooting sports from Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I would like to push forward with the efforts started by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—I am pleased to see him present—to make the case for the reinstatement of shooting sports at the 2022 Commonwealth games in Birmingham. I have picked up many of the points raised during his Adjournment debate, and I will expand on them in the wake of the home nations' phenomenal performance at the Gold Coast Commonwealth games this year.

The decision not to include shooting in the 2022 Commonwealth games in Birmingham has left many in the UK, particularly in my constituency, confused and unhappy. The matter is of particular importance to a constituent of mine, David McMath, a 21-year-old young man who recently won gold in the men's double trap competition at the games this year. He set a games record with a total of 74—four ahead of his nearest rival, Tim Kneale from the Isle of Man, who took silver.

Without a doubt, shooting is a source of extreme national pride for the home nations of the United Kingdom, as it is one of our strongest sports. In fact, we are the second strongest group in shooting events and managed to collect 38% of the medals on offer this year. Not adding shooting to the 2022 games has taken away 57 medal opportunities. Every one of the home nations and Channel Islands participated in the shooting events, which proves the sport's popularity. In fact, it was the only sport for which the Isle of Man won a medal this year. Given that England came second in the medals table for the past three games, it seems odd and counterproductive that shooting has been removed from the programme.

The Birmingham organisers cited venue issues as the reason not to include shooting in 2022, stating that the only suitable venue would be Bisley, which, at 130 miles from Birmingham, is too far away.

**Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con):** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene so early in his speech. The notion that Bisley is too far away is simply nonsensical. It was upgraded for the Commonwealth games a number of years ago and is a perfect, ready-made and ready-prepared venue for these events. In addition to the fact that we have lots of medal opportunities in shooting, it is a totally egalitarian sport. People with disabilities, and people of different genders and abilities can compete on the same basis; there is no better sport to demonstrate that.

**Mr Jack:** My hon. Friend makes a number of excellent points and he will be pleased to know that I will cover them all. As I have said, the organisers said that Bisley, at 130 miles from Birmingham, is too far away. They also claimed that it would be too expensive to renovate Bisley. That argument has little merit when we consider that they decided to use the London velodrome track for cycling, which is 135 miles away.

[Mr Jack]

As my hon. Friend has said, Bisley shooting ground was deemed adequate for the Commonwealth games held in Manchester in 2002. Manchester is significantly further north than Birmingham, at a total of 215 miles from Bisley.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on a topic that we are all interested in. The fact that more of those who participated in the Adjournment debate are not here does not mean it is any less of a concern today. Does he agree that the removal of shooting sports from the Birmingham games appears to have more to do with misconceptions about the sport than with a lack of facilities? Will he join me in sincerely urging the Minister to use her influence—I know she is keen to do so—to incorporate this very popular and successful sport into the schedule before it is too late?

**Mr Jack:** The hon. Gentleman makes very good points and I agree with him.

Manchester used Bisley in 2002, although it is 215 miles from the shooting ground. I therefore argue that it can be done and that Bisley can provide the required facilities. I concede that Bisley is not in tip-top condition, but the venue remains fully operational and would require only light modernisation to bring it up to scratch. With 95% of the competition venues already in place, minor refurbishment of the Bisley shooting ground would not add an unfeasible workload to the games organisers.

A second solution is to build a new site alongside the new national shooting centre for which UK Sport and British Shooting are currently securing funding and planning permission. If the organisers of the Birmingham games were to link funding to the national governing body, it would be a fantastic opportunity to ensure that the games leave a lasting legacy.

Shooting is currently on a list of optional sports, from which the host city must choose seven. The organisers of Birmingham 2022 have opted to include table tennis, for which England has only ever won 15 medals. That pales in comparison with the 168 medals won for shooting. They have also opted for 3x3 basketball, which is a novelty in the Commonwealth games. I think shooting is a more important sport.

Given that I have just presented a counter-argument and an alternative option to the venue issue cited by the Birmingham organisers, I see no logical reason why England would want to cheat herself of a significant number of medals by removing shooting from the agenda.

Shooting has been on the Commonwealth games agenda at every games bar 1970. It was originally introduced in 1966 and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) has said, it is one of the most diverse and inclusive sports on offer. Two of the 13 shooting events—the fullbore rifle competitions—are open to men and women. They are the only competitions at the Commonwealth games in which men and women compete equally on an open field. The sport gets people of all backgrounds out and competing. Competitors do not have to be incredibly fit to be active in the sport, which means that people can compete in it for longer. At this year's games on the Gold Coast, Scotland had

two medallists, a man and a woman, aged 21, and two medallists, also a man and a woman, over the age of 50. There was even a competitor from Canada who was in his 80s.

In the spirit of inclusivity, it is worth mentioning that, for many of the small Commonwealth nations, such as Cyprus, Malta, the Falkland Islands, Niue, Norfolk Island and Papa New Guinea, shooting is a dominant sport. Without shooting, some of those nations would not be able to send teams to the games at all. Norfolk Island only sent shooters and bowlers to the 2018 Gold Coast games, and the Turks and Caicos Islands only sent teams for shooting and athletics. To remove shooting from the games would possibly be to deny those small nations access to the competition altogether.

This debate has taken on an international flavour, as I have been contacted by the Crown Prince of Patiala, India, His Highness Raninder Singh, who is also president of the National Rifle Association of India. He stresses how important it is for his country to be involved. I have also had support from Lord Bilimoria, who is in Kenya and has similar strong feelings.

Let me also highlight the impact that this decision would have on India's medal standing. India is the largest member state, and shooting sports contributed to 24% of the medals she won at the Gold Coast Commonwealth games. At the previous games in Glasgow, 23% of her medals came from shooting sports. Not to include shooting sports in Birmingham will deny India the ability to maximise and showcase her shooting athletes' skills, which have enabled them to secure the No. 1 position in shooting in the past two games.

Birmingham was only recently announced as the host of the 2022 games. Although I am obviously pleased for the city, it should be noted that the original host, Durban, had confirmed that shooting would be on the agenda. The sudden removal of the sport will deprive the home nations not only of the chance to excel on the medal table but of the opportunity to test their skills on an international stage before the Olympic games in 2024.

The support for the shooting competitions only increases with each games. That is highlighted by 38 of 72 nations competing in the sport at this year's Gold Coast games. Additionally, the *Shooting Times* recently launched a petition to get shooting back on the agenda for 2022, and in just four months it has already been signed by more than 60,000 people. To include shooting sports in 2022 will have the threefold effect of boosting the home nations' performances in the medal table, offering a more diverse and inclusive competition, and creating a forum for the numerous shooting athletes who use the Commonwealth games as a stepping stone to the Olympics.

Therefore, for the reasons I have outlined, I urge the organisers of the Birmingham Commonwealth games to reconsider their decision and to reinstate shooting on the agenda.

11.10 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Mr Jack) for leading today's debate, which

follows the recent Adjournment debate tabled by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) for his intervention. He contributed to the Adjournment debate, and he made a powerful point about the egalitarian nature of the sport.

This is clearly a matter that invokes much passion and is of personal interest to a number of Members across the whole House and their constituents. I am happy to confirm right at the outset that both the Secretary of State and I support the request for the Birmingham games to include shooting, but I should explain our limitations as Ministers of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and the other challenges that need to be overcome.

First, let us remind ourselves of the phenomenal success of shooting at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games, hosted at the Royal Artillery barracks. The tears of joy of double trap gold medallist Peter Wilson were a lasting image of the emotion felt by dedicated athletes at the top of their sport. His success was followed by incredible performances at the Gold Coast Commonwealth games by our home nation athletes. They returned from Australia with an impressive 21 medals—22 including the medal won for the Isle of Man. The athletes included David McMath, who won gold in the double trap and, as has been mentioned, is a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway. I am sure that Members will join me in recognising and applauding the efforts of our athletes on the international sporting stage. It is a testament to the efforts of these athletes, and to the wider high-performance sporting framework in the UK, that British athletes continue to produce medal-winning performances that inspire us all.

Being the next host city for the Commonwealth games will bring a huge number of positive opportunities to the city of Birmingham, the wider west midlands and the UK as a whole. They will showcase to the world the best of Britain as a destination for international trade, provide new economic growth and social benefits and maximise legacy opportunities for the west midlands. Government have been working closely with their partners Birmingham City Council, Commonwealth Games England, West Midlands Combined Authority and the Commonwealth Games Federation to begin preparations. The process to set up the board of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth games organising committee is well under way.

Hosting the games is a significant undertaking that, despite presenting enormous opportunities for Birmingham and the UK, must be done within the requirements of the Commonwealth Games Federation and in a pragmatic way. As custodians of public funds, we must recognise that any changes to the sport programme agreed by games partners will have a financial implication. It is our duty to ensure that the event is delivered in a cost-effective way. As my hon. Friend and hon. Members who contributed to the Adjournment debate will be aware, the host city is bound by regulations that prescribe the delivery of 16 core sports. Contrary to what my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway said, table tennis is a core sport, not an optional sport. In addition, the host city is able to select a small number of sports from the optional list, of which shooting is one.

Shooting is one of the top five most popular sports among participating Commonwealth nations and territories. At Glasgow 2014, more than 350 athletes represented 39 nations and territories. At Gold Coast 2018, 281 athletes from 38 nations and territories took part in the shooting disciplines. I am conscious of my hon. Friend's point that large Commonwealth countries such as India participate in shooting, but so do very small nations, who contribute a great deal. The list of nations and territories that participated in Glasgow and in Gold Coast include Norfolk Island and Niue, which my hon. Friend mentioned. I am trying to work out whether they are the two smallest; Norfolk Island has a population of about 1,700 people, yet it had eight athletes competing in the shooting discipline at the Gold Coast Commonwealth games.

When selecting optional sports, the games partners should take into account the delivery of a diverse sport programme that will appeal to spectators domestically and abroad; hosting a sport programme that features gender equity and appropriate para-sport inclusion; sport operational staging costs; and the existence of suitable, well-located venues.

Although I hear what my hon. Friend says about Bisley and the London velodrome being equidistant, by the time the games take place, the Bisley venue will be nearly 20 years old. Advancements in the sport and the scale of the events in shooting dictate that the upgrade would incur significant costs. Satellite accommodation would also be required. I understand his point about the geographical aspects—that is not necessarily the argument in this case—but there is a cost incurred. He and the hon. Member for Strangford, who are passionate about shooting, will, I am sure, appreciate that if we are to host a shooting event, we must have the best venue, to attract the world's best shooters.

**Mr Jack:** The Minister says that Bisley is 20 years old; it has been 20 years since its last refurbishment, but it is much older than that. As a teenager, I shot at Bisley, so I can assure the Minister it is a lot older. It is not a significant cost to bring it up to standard. Could the Minister speak to the games organisers, to put some form of costing in place and to assess generally how expensive it would be to go to Bisley? My understanding is that there is not much to do.

**Tracey Crouch:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's clarification, but it is not just about the cost; it could also be about the accommodation. We are looking at the issue and, as I said at the outset, the Secretary of State and I both support the inclusion of shooting, but as core partners in the delivery of the Commonwealth games, we must ensure we deliver a cost-effective games. These are not necessarily challenges that we cannot overcome, but they are challenges.

**Jim Shannon:** Perhaps there is a glimmer of hope in the Minister's response. Bisley is a world-renowned championship venue for many events. The skeletal frame is in place, but if some edges need to be sharpened—if accommodation needs to be arranged and some other small things need to be done—that is not impossible. It is an acceptable venue, and a wee bit more effort would make it conform to all requirements. Surely we should do our best to make that happen.

**Tracey Crouch:** I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman or with my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway, but there are logistical and cost challenges. They are not necessarily ones that we cannot overcome, and both Members are right to place their points on the record, to ensure that anyone reading this debate, particularly from the Commonwealth Games Federation, understands that there is a real desire to support everybody in overcoming the challenges.

**Mr Jack:** I thank the Minister for her detailed response. The point about the accommodation could be a spurious argument from the games organisers, because the athletes competing in the other sports that replace shooting will still need accommodation. Whether that is near Bisley or Birmingham, there is still a cost. There may be an opportunity cost, but it is not a saving in real terms.

**Tracey Crouch:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We can further discuss the assumptions in his point after the debate.

In selecting optional sports, the games partners have to take into account the four considerations I just outlined, while complying with the athlete and team official quota restrictions set by the Commonwealth Games Federation, which is one of the assumptions my hon. Friend alluded to. The games partners have developed a sport programme that includes 3x3 basketball and 3x3 para-basketball, track cycling and para-track cycling, mountain biking, diving, rhythmic gymnastics and para-triathlon.

I will have to disagree slightly with my hon. Friend about the value of some of those optional sports, which are popular within particular communities that we are trying to engage in sport. In looking at an overall sporting programme, we must ensure that we are inspiring a large number of people across all sectors of society.

More than 2 million people in the UK regularly participate in the sports I just listed, and the home nations collected 37 medals from those events on the Gold Coast.

I do, however, understand my hon. Friend's concerns, and I sympathise with his position. Shooting's popularity across the Commonwealth nations and territories, from the largest nation to the smallest, is enormous, and the home nations have had a particularly strong track record at previous games.

In recognition of that and of the value that shooting brings to the games, the Secretary of State and I are exploring with games partners the potential for including shooting in the sport programme. However, I stress that that decision is beyond our remit, and we have an enormous challenge, in that Birmingham was awarded the games with just 4.5 years to deliver, rather than the usual seven years. While I have no doubt that the city will deliver an outstanding event, despite that timeframe, a number of practical considerations must be taken into account to ensure that the games are delivered successfully. While planning for the games continues, we continue to invest in shooting and its athletes' medal-winning aspirations. Colleagues will be pleased to hear that UK Sport is providing £6.9 million of funding for the Tokyo 2020 shooting performance cycle and £2.5 million for para-shooting.

The Government support the notion of shooting being included, and will work with partners to overcome logistical challenges, if required. We will continue to work with games partners. In the meantime, I am sure my hon. Friend and others will join me in supporting all those involved to ensure the delivery of a fantastic Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth games.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.22 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Scottish Economy

[MRS ANNE MAIN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Ged Killen** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the Scottish economy.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main, and to bring such an important and timely debate to the House. I am pleased to see so many colleagues here, although I am disappointed that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales is the only Government Minister who could join us. I know the Government take a rather apathetic view of devolution these days—  
[*Interruption.*]

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Let the hon. Member continue.

**Ged Killen:** I must point out that this is a debate about the Scottish economy, so I am not sure whether the presence of the Minister, albeit welcome, is an indication of diary conflicts, or that we are all the same in the eyes of the UK Government. It would have been nice to see someone from the Scotland Office or perhaps a Treasury Minister here to answer the debate.

It has been 10 years since the financial crisis, and in an ideal world we would be looking back on the crisis from a renewed position of strength, with the fundamentals of our economy strong, and with optimism for the future. Sadly, that is not where we find ourselves. Following a decade of economic mismanagement of Scotland by the Scottish National party and Conservative Governments, Scotland's economy has failed to recover to above pre-crisis levels in a number of areas. The fundamentals of the economy are structurally unsound, with built-in constraints on future growth, and we appear to be trapped between two economic futures: one a Tory hard Brexit, the other supercharged austerity under the SNP's growth commission.

The Scottish people have lost a decade of economic growth. Under the projections of the Scottish Fiscal Commission, that lost decade threatens to turn into a generation. However, I remain optimistic, because there is a third way: a Labour vision for the economy—an economy driven by investment, not cuts, and a vision that has an optimistic outlook for the Scottish economy, rather than one of managed decline. Today, I will set out where the Scottish economy stands; the two visions before us as posed by the UK and Scottish Governments; and the third way offered by the Labour party.

Ten years on from the financial crisis, the Scottish economy is in a difficult position. Economic growth remains heavily stagnant. GDP growth in Scotland has averaged out at less than 1% per year since the financial crisis, while the rest of the UK has done only slightly better. Unfortunately, things are not expected to get much better, because the Scottish Fiscal Commission does not expect growth to rise above 1% until after at least 2023. If that is the case, Scotland's economy will not just have been at a standstill for a decade, but will have remained in the freezer for a generation.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the consequence of this slow growth in our economy is that an estimated £1.7 billion projected to be raised in tax will not be raised at all, and that we will have a deficit in the revenue that is expected to fund the public services we all depend on?

**Ged Killen:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. We have a serious issue with how we expect to finance public spending in Scotland, and I will come on to that later.

Unfortunately, the story is the same when we turn to productivity. While the productivity puzzle on these islands has been a problem for both Scotland and the rest of the UK, the most recent figures show that in Scotland the puzzle is even more complex, and while UK productivity has risen by 0.7%, trend productivity in Scotland is zero. On key indicators for growing our economy and making our workers more productive, the SNP Government have an even poorer track record than the UK Government. That means that the country is not reaching its full potential, and the average person's wages are being squeezed more and more. In the real world, in terms of how far towards the end of the month people's pay reaches, when it comes to buying food, paying bills and socialising, the average Scot is worse off now than they were 10 years ago and is doing worse than the UK average.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): The hon. Gentleman makes a point about take-home pay and how much workers have in their pay packets, but when the SNP and Scottish Parliament announced their "Nat Tax", his Labour colleagues in the Scottish Parliament argued that it did not go high enough. They wanted to take greater taxes off the hard-working Scots. How can he complain about how much people are taking home in their pay packets, when he wants to increase tax and take more money out of those pay packets?

**Ged Killen:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments; I know we have very different views on tax and spend, and I do not think we will resolve them here.

To add to all that, Scotland is more unequal than ever. The wealth disparity means that the average household would need to save every penny of their income for 43 years to enter the top 10% of wealthiest Scots. A failure to increase wages, build more houses or spread wealth means that the most significant factor in determining whether a person will own their own home or secure a top-tier job is not their skills and talents, but who their parents are and where they live. A Scotland where circumstances of birth will take people further than their skills and talents is not the kind of country we should aspire to be, but that is the situation we find ourselves in.

Despite those facts, the vision put forward by our governing parties is not for the radical transformation that is clearly needed. On one side, one of Scotland's Governments supports a damaging Brexit policy that will cut the ties of Scotland and the rest of the UK to the EU's internal markets and the customs union. The Fraser of Allander Institute has modelled that with each degree of separation from those two tenets of the EU, Scotland will be more and more damaged. Scotland faces being between 2% and 5% worse off in GDP terms

[Ged Killen]

as a result of this Tory Brexit, while in the worst of cases, under a no-deal Brexit, in which we default to World Trade Organisation rules, wage growth will go into reverse, the economy will shrink and, most worryingly, Scotland's successful food and drinks exporting industry could suffer as much as a 26% reduction in trade.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Can the hon. Gentleman explain how the position of his party's Front Benchers on Brexit is any different from that of the Conservative Government?

**Ged Killen:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments; he is obviously not paying very close attention in the Chamber. The UK Governments have very clear red lines drawn all over the place, and none of them seem to reach any kind of consensus. [Interruption.]

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. I know the hon. Gentleman's remarks are provoking comments, but please can those comments be kept to either interventions or speeches?

**Ged Killen:** Thank you, Mrs Main. The Labour party position is quite clearly putting jobs and the economy first. If the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) intends to contribute to this debate, perhaps he can explain why it is very important for Scotland's economy to remain in the European Union but his party wants to take us out of the United Kingdom. That is something I would find difficult to square.

The UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Fraser of Allander Institute have all warned of serious damage to Scotland's economy as the result of a no-deal Brexit. Worryingly, recently it has seemed that some members of the Conservative party believe that that is an acceptable outcome. In no circumstances should any public representative be recommending that that risk be taken in pursuit of gains that, in my view, are vastly outweighed by the negatives.

On the other side of the equation we have the SNP Government, who have produced a growth commission to set out how they want to see Scotland's economy grow in the future. In 2015 and 2017, the SNP stood on a manifesto that claimed that it was anti-austerity. The publication of the growth commission and the endorsement of its policies by the First Minister should represent the day when the mask slipped and the SNP was shown to be the party of austerity that we know it to be.

In the growth commission, the Scottish Government propose reducing Scotland's budget deficit through an approach that would see spending on public services and benefits fall by about 4% of GDP over a decade. Compare that with the policies of the Conservative UK Government, as set out by the Office for Budget Responsibility. The UK Government's projections see spending on public services and benefits over a five-year period, from 2018-19 to 2022-23, falling by 0.9% of GDP. The plans set out by the SNP in the growth commission would mean the Scottish Government cutting public expenditure on public services and benefits close to five times faster than this Conservative UK Government.

In its model for the future of an independent Scottish economy, the SNP has given up on monetary policy as a tool for stimulating the economy. By not proposing a new currency and by setting public spending and borrowing targets that even George Osborne would have considered ambitious, the SNP has baked serious public spending cuts into its preferred future economic model. Relying on fiscal policy alone to reduce Government debt and budget deficits, they will have to introduce spending cuts, raise taxes or do a combination of both. That is the dictionary definition of austerity.

Those are the most optimistic of figures. The IFS says that, with an ageing population adding to the pressures on the health, social care and state pension budgets, keeping to the growth commission's targets would likely require cuts to many public services, with the commission not taking the time to spell out exactly where the axe would fall and who would lose out as a consequence. Furthermore, the IFS also said what all know to be true:

"It is also inconsistent to claim that these plans do not amount to austerity but the UK government's current policy does",

particularly while the growth commission's plans

"imply slightly slower real growth in spending than the UK Government is currently implementing."

I am sure that the SNP will not cease to call itself the anti-austerity party, even after the growth commission's publication. However, the facts speak for themselves. These are empty calls and stolen clothing. The growth commission is most disappointing because of its lack of ambition. The two Governments of Scotland have produced plans for the future of the Scottish economy that leave much to be desired, and it is therefore up to the Labour party to present a true alternative.

The Scottish economy has three core structural problems: stagnant GDP growth, low productivity and demographic challenges caused by a projected significant increase in the over-65 population and a shrinking in the relative size of the economically active population. Labour has a vision to address all three problems. The problems of growth and productivity cannot be separated; they are twin problems. The Scottish labour market is strong—we have a relatively low unemployment rate by European standards, and an exceptionally low youth unemployment rate.

However, while unemployment has decreased over the years, wages have stagnated and economic output has not matched the increase in the labour force that would usually be expected. That is because, while jobs have been created, they are predominantly low-skill, low-wage jobs that have not helped to accelerate growth; nor have they been productive enough to increase wages. By introducing a minimum wage of £10 per hour, we can reverse the trend of low wages and encourage investment to improve labour productivity. If we increase the minimum wage, companies will have to invest in technology and training to improve the output of their workforce to match the demands they are under. No longer will low-wage, gig economy jobs serve to undercut the advantages of investment.

**Neil Gray:** The hon. Gentleman talks about raising the minimum wage, which is a laudable aim for us all to strive for. However, we are talking about Scotland's economy, and he will of course realise that this area of

economic policy is reserved to the UK Government, so this is not in the gift of the Scottish Government to enforce.

**Ged Killen:** The hon. Gentleman will of course realise that we are in the UK Parliament. Scotland has two Governments, and I am talking about Labour's vision for both. *[Interruption.]*

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Mr Gray, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) has taken your intervention. Please do not carry on your conversation.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** Does the hon. Gentleman support the devolution of employment law?

**Ged Killen:** Perhaps the hon. Lady will tell us in her remarks how her party intends to change employment law, if it is devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Scotland suffers from under-investment. While the Scottish Government have produced many investment packages, they are often too small, too numerous and too unfocused to deliver the outcomes they are set up to achieve. Those are not my words but the conclusions of recent reports by the Fraser of Allander Institute and the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee.

Under the current Scottish Government, we have had economic development plans governed by press release. Labour proposes real investment to correct the problems of stagnant labour productivity and GDP growth. We aim to stimulate investment more widely through a national plan that focuses long-term investment on local and national infrastructure, such as information, communication, services and production technologies, as well as in physical infrastructure, such as roads, buildings and town and city centres. That will not only correct the decade of under-investment that led to the productivity problem, but begin the vital future-proofing of the Scottish workforce against the challenges of automation and increasing digitalisation.

Furthermore, we plan to examine the possibility of public sector pension funds using their resources to establish a Scottish public provident fund, which could invest in local production and infrastructure, boost local supply chains and stimulate employment.

We will implement our industrial strategy and invest in Scotland's economy. We will also encourage and incentivise firms in Scotland to raise the percentage of turnover invested in research and development. Scotland is only ninth in the UK in R&D spend per head, so such measures are sorely needed and will be vital in solving the productivity puzzle. Those kinds of investments will encourage the growth of new industries. An excellent example of that is CST Global in my constituency—a photonics manufacturer that I believe represents the future of jobs in Scotland.

CST Global has shown itself to be a significantly high-growth, high-skill business. It has sustained strong annual growth, with revenues increasing by 88% in a year to £6.7 million in 2017. It is a strong exporter, and the photonics industry is one of the UK's most productive. On average, each employee in the sector contributes £62,000 to the economy in gross value per year—three times

the UK average. These companies also have some of the highest export rates of any industry, exporting an average of 75% of their manufactured output.

Such companies are often city-based, and we would not typically expect them to be found in smaller towns, such as Blantyre in my constituency. However, CST Global has proven that that need not be the case; when conditions are right, those companies can not only do well but thrive in these places. CST Global is very welcome in Blantyre. Supporting such businesses is central to the investment-based economic model. If we want to see the future of the Scottish economy defined by high-skill, high-wage and high-tech jobs, we have to invest.

**Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP):** If the hon. Gentleman is genuinely interested in growing the Scottish economy, he should support the devolution of powers to set VAT and national insurance rates, and to collect fuel duties, capital gains tax, interest on dividends and export duties, as well as all the other powers that the Scottish Parliament does not possess and is therefore unable to use to grow our economy.

**Ged Killen:** It is nice to see that both the hon. Lady and her favourite pantomime villains have turned up to continue the set-to that we often see in the Chamber. I am here to make a speech on what I believe is right for the Scottish economy. She will clearly disagree on several areas, and she can set those out in her remarks. As always for SNP Members, independence is the answer, no matter the question. I am surprised to hear SNP Members now talk about devolution so much, given that they have always opposed it. *[Interruption.]*

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. This is becoming somewhat intolerable. No respect is being shown to the hon. Gentleman, who is trying to make his speech. This is not a conversation among Members; it is a debate, which will be held in the proper manner. I ask all colleagues to respect the hon. Members making speeches and to keep their remarks to themselves or to voice them in the proper manner—through interventions.

**Ged Killen:** Thank you, Mrs Main. While we invest in a productive workforce, we must also attract talent to fill those spaces. All of Scotland's population growth from 2016 to 2041 will derive from inward migration, as deaths will outnumber births in each year. Brexit therefore presents a risk, as it could reduce inward migration from the EU. However, even without Brexit, population growth is too slow and lags behind that of other parts of the UK, both in terms of birth and death rates, and through inward migration. We can correct that by supporting a needs-based immigration system. It is simply unhelpful to focus on an abstract number, as the UK Government are doing—or are failing to do.

However, we must also build the communities that attract the best talent. That is why we have called on the Scottish and UK Governments to get on with the completion of the city deals projects. People move to cities and communities. The delivery of more than £1 billion of funding and the devolution of further powers will allow our cities and communities to make themselves attractive to international talent on their own terms, rather than having terms dictated by Holyrood or Westminster.

[Ged Killen]

Overall, 83% of Scotland's population—4.5 million people—live in areas covered by existing or planned city region deals. That is a huge amount of talent and aspiration to be unlocked, and we simply cannot wait any longer. However, those deals have been bogged down as both the Scottish and UK Governments cannot bring themselves together to settle the matter. We have seen in the wrangling over the devolution settlement that the SNP and Conservative party can lock themselves in disagreement if it is politically opportune to do so; dare I say that we have seen that today? However, the people of Scotland should not be punished because of the narrow interests of the two governing parties.

In conclusion, Scotland has lost a decade of economic progress under its two Governments. If nothing changes, this decade threatens to turn into a generation of stagnation. However, an opportunity exists to turn this around, and the pathway to growth is best fulfilled by an investment-based economic model.

2.49 pm

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your direction, Mrs Main. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing this important debate on a matter that is close to my and many of my colleagues' hearts.

I will begin by looking at some of the statistical indicators for Scotland's current economic performance, starting with GDP. Scotland's GDP was 1.7% in 2015; it plummeted to 0.2% in 2016 and rose marginally, to 0.4%, in 2017. In comparison, UK GDP was 2.3% in 2015, 1.9% in 2016 and 1.8% in 2017. The employment rate in Scotland in the first three months of 2018 was 75.2%, compared with a UK rate of 75.6%. The unemployment rate in Scotland was 4.3%, slightly higher than the UK rate of 4.2%, over the same period.

**Neil Gray:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Luke Graham:** Not just now. According to figures provided by the House of Commons Library, the unemployment rate for my constituency of Ochil and South Perthshire is 0.5% higher than the UK unemployment rate. Meanwhile, the Scottish Fiscal Commission's predicted growth rate for Scotland is 0.7% in 2018, 0.8% in 2019 and 0.9% thereafter until 2022. In comparison, the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast the UK growth rate to be 1.5% this year, 1.3% next year and to rise thereafter to 1.5% over the same period.

The more observant among us will have noticed that for every single one of those economic statistics, Scotland lags behind the UK in terms of economic performance. However, it is not just in GDP, employment and unemployment rates or forecast growth that that is the case. Scotland's median weekly earnings are also lower than those of the UK. When it comes to small business confidence, Scotland lags about 23 percentage points behind the UK. Meanwhile, Scotland has higher public sector expenditure per head yet lower public sector revenue per head than the UK. Put simply, Scottish taxpayers are not getting value for money from their public sector.

Under the guidance of the SNP, the Scottish economy has grown at half the UK rate. It has failed to meet its targets to match the UK GDP growth rate and succeeded only in overseeing the slowest growth rate of any country in the EU.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy that the responsibility for the growth of all the nations of the UK sits firmly with him?

**Luke Graham:** That is why we are having a debate in this place—because growth is the responsibility of the United Kingdom. The problem is the claims of the SNP Administration that they champion economic growth in Scotland. Scottish Enterprise is devolved. Much of the tourism is devolved. The scream for powers has meant that so many levers have been denied to this place and put into Edinburgh. Although I agree that accountability—[*Interruption.*] If you want to make an intervention, stand up and make one, madam.

**Deidre Brock:** I will.

**Luke Graham:** Come on then.

**Deidre Brock:** I am just going to repeat what I said before: the setting of VAT rates, national insurance, fuel duties, capital gains tax are not devolved to the Scottish Parliament and therefore can have no impact on the economic powers that the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

**Luke Graham:** The hon. Lady repeats the point, and it is as weak as it was the first time.

The Scottish economy is not forecast to grow by more than 1% at any stage over the next five years. As a result, the Scottish economy will be more than £18 billion smaller by 2022. It is not helped one iota by any devolved power, whereas in this place we have been trying to help the Scottish economy.

**Stephen Kerr:** Does my hon. Friend agree with the conclusion of the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee of the Scottish Parliament, which includes, I think, four or five SNP Members? It states:

"If we are to reverse this trend then the Scottish Government must use all of the levers at its disposal to bring a sharper focus on growing the economy, and ensuring that growth is inclusive."

That is something they are failing to do currently.

**Luke Graham:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention; I could not agree more. One point on which I do agree with the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West is that Scotland has two levels of government—one in Edinburgh and one in Westminster—and they should work together productively to try to improve Scotland's economic performance, which lags behind that of the UK. As a Member who has just negotiated a city deal for his region, I can say honestly, hand on heart, that the two levels of government are not working well together. The relationship is dysfunctional; it does not work. Powers are being hoarded in Edinburgh and not given down to the local authorities, as they should be.

Productivity is lower than it was in 2010 and the gap between Scottish and UK productivity is wider than it was in 2009. Scotland has the lowest rate of business growth in the UK and is forced to pay the highest business rates in Europe. In addition, the SNP broke a major manifesto promise and raised tax on more than 1 million Scots earning over £26,000, ensuring that Scotland's wealth creators have less of their wealth to create more through further investment.

We talk about powers a lot in this place; the issue dominates a lot of our debate, but let us be clear. The only power given back was that to vary income tax by 1p, and it was given back to Westminster by the SNP, having originally been devolved under the Scotland Act 1998. The Conservatives do not give away powers; the SNP does. *[Interruption.]* Between 2010 and 2016, Scotland's economic growth rate was 1.7%, compared with—*[Interruption.]*

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) must control herself. She is not down to speak, but she can speak if she wishes to rise. Will she please limit her remarks to either interventions or a speech, instead of barracking?

**Luke Graham:** Scotland's economic growth rate was 1.7%, compared with 1.9% for the UK, and that was even before Brexit, showing that Scotland's economy consistently performs worse than that of the United Kingdom.

Last year the SNP Administration set up the Scottish growth scheme—a £500 million fund designed “to help businesses thrive and grow”.

They have spent only £25 million of that fund. Similarly, they have failed to spend a single penny of the £36 million digital growth fund since it was announced in March 2017. Meanwhile, last Thursday, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution, Derek Mackay, announced that there was a £453 million underspend by the SNP Administration in the last financial year. It is the fourth year in a row that the SNP Administration have underspent their budget. In total, it is more than £1.2 billion that they have chosen to deprive the Scottish economy of since 2014. That is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, my local councils in Clackmannanshire and Perth and Kinross are forced to increase council tax and cut services for our local residents. That means cuts to music tuition, public transport and the upkeep of our paths and roads. It is unacceptable and it cannot go on.

This is not about Brexit. It is about the deliberately dysfunctional devolution overseen by the Scottish National party. The SNP is failing our constituents through its woeful mismanagement of the Scottish economy and its refusal to invest the money that we already have and the money that comes from this place, which should be going directly to our constituents. If they do not want to use the levers of administration to improve the Scottish economy, perhaps it is time to stand aside for the Conservative and Unionist Opposition, who certainly will.

2.56 pm

**Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Main, for what I believe is the first time. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing this very important debate.

A key component missing from the plan for the future of Scotland's economy is an appropriate and robust industrial strategy, on which I will focus my remarks. Neither the UK Government nor the Scottish Government have a coherent strategy for industry in Scotland. As a result, Scotland's economy is declining. Economic growth has slowed to well below its historical average. It was 0.2% during the first quarter of 2018, according to figures released today. Real wages are lower today than they were in 2010, and closures continue.

One of the areas where the lack of an industrial strategy is clearest is the construction sector. Crummock, a construction firm in my constituency of Midlothian, recently collapsed and its closure led to the direct loss of almost 300 jobs.

**Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD):** Does the hon. Lady share my concern that the industrial strategy that Scotland requires needs a strong, well-functioning and delivering education system? Over the past decade, Scotland's education system has been undermined to the extent that one in five children now leave school functionally illiterate.

**Danielle Rowley:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I absolutely agree that education is a fundamental part of growing industry in Scotland.

The collapse of Crummock in my constituency is just the latest example of the deep problems surrounding the financial health and stability of the Scottish construction industry.

**John Lamont:** The hon. Lady is speaking very well about the economic challenges that Scotland faces. Does she agree that those challenges would be turned into complete misery for the people of Scotland if the SNP had its way and ripped Scotland out of the United Kingdom?

**Danielle Rowley:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He will know that I would agree with that.

To focus on the construction industry, the collapse of Crummock is just one of many that we have seen recently, with many job losses, in Scotland. The closure of large employers such as Crummock will have a significant impact on local economies. A number of suppliers and service providers have spoken to me about their worries. A small electrical company and those providing cleaning services have expressed to me concerns about the future of their businesses following Crummock's closure. Such closures reflect the failure of an economic strategy that is over-reliant on free-market forces, as well as an absence of joined-up Government policy and action, especially in public procurement.

**Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con):** You mentioned the lack of free-market forces. Do you agree with your shadow Chancellor when he says that he wants to overthrow capitalism and bring down Britain's system of free enterprise? That would mean fewer jobs, less money for public services and untold damage to the Scottish economy. Do you agree with his position?

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Please speak through the Chair. I do not agree with any of that. Ask the hon. Lady if she agrees with that.

**Danielle Rowley:** Thank you, Mrs Main. I think that overthrowing capitalism is a matter bigger than this debate. Perhaps we can debate it some other time.

Crummock's recent accounts noted that the absence of public sector contracts was the biggest risk to the firm's future. That includes Scottish Government contracts and local authority contracts, which have been declining as local government budgets are slashed. That suggests the need for an investigation into how public institutions can best use the resources available and better support the construction sector and the wider industry in Scotland. It also suggests that the decline in council revenue funding overseen by the Scottish Government, which has fallen in real terms by 9.6% since 2010, is having a severe impact on Scotland's local economies.

By contrast, Scottish Labour plans to invest in Scotland's economy. Labour policy would see £70 billion of investment in industry in Scotland. We would create a national investment bank that would see £20 billion of capital structured in Scotland for industrial strategy and investment. That is the scale of investment required to get the sector to where it needs to be. We need to be investing in the tune of billions of pounds, not just the millions of pounds put forward by the SNP.

Closures in the construction industry have further highlighted the vital need to proactively plan for the sustainable development of our industrial base. Rather than simply reacting to market failure, we must plan ahead. As part of that, the Scottish Government need to properly investigate why well-established Scottish construction companies are collapsing.

The focus of that investigation should include any changes to the way in which banks finance companies. We need to look at why it is taking so long for subcontractors to be paid by client companies, which is another huge issue raised with me. The investigation must also look at office-based workers and administration staff who are affected by construction sector closures. The construction industry already displays the largest gender pay gap. Once again, female workers are disproportionately and adversely affected by the collapse of construction companies.

Another area where there is a clear need for a coherent strategy to support our economy is our struggling high streets. We need to mitigate the effects of RBS bank closures and post office closures. The Secretary of State for Scotland needs to work with the Scottish Government to develop an appropriate industrial strategy for Scotland. Both Governments must work with our local councils and properly fund them, so that our local economies can be supported.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. The wind-ups will start at 3.30 pm. I hope not to impose a time limit on speeches. If all hon. Members confine their remarks to about five minutes or less, we will not need one.

3.3 pm

**Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate my colleague on the Scottish Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen), on securing this important debate.

East Renfrewshire is home to the thriving small businesses and micro-enterprises that power the British economy while also providing investment and employment for the local community. It is these companies that help make Britain one of the largest economies in the world, which helps provide our vital public services. We have more established names, such as Barrhead Travel and A. C. Whyte, which are based in East Renfrewshire but are world leaders in their sector, as well as dynamic, newer enterprises, such as J&M Murdoch & Son, which was recently recognised in the 2018 London Stock Exchange report, "1000 Companies to Inspire". The Scottish and UK Governments must prioritise and support those companies and many thousands like them, if we are to encourage investment and continue to grow our sluggish economy.

For too long, however, a high oil price has hidden Scotland's economic underperformance, allowing Scottish Governments of both colours to neglect fixing the Scottish economy's fundamentals. Most recently, the Scottish Parliament's own highly respected Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee unanimously agreed a report that stated that in Scotland,

"levels of GDP growth are marginal, productivity low and wages are stagnant".

Scotland's major problem, as the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West has highlighted, is its productivity, which is at a lower level than it was in 2010. The gap between UK and Scottish productivity is larger than it was in 2009.

The Scottish Government do deserve some credit for setting up the new Scottish national investment bank. Ultimately, however, it was a rehashed announcement of something that has already supposedly been launched multiple times by this tired, separatist Government. If it does come to fruition, it will be a positive step for the Scottish economy, but we will have to wait and see what happens.

Last year, the Scottish economy grew at less than half the rate of the UK and slower than every single EU country. Future predictions are not particularly positive. The Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasts that Scotland will fail to match wider UK economic growth for the next five years. That is really important, because it means less money for the Scottish NHS, Scottish schools and other Scottish public services. It means less money in the pockets of those struggling to get by and businesses taking on fewer staff. It means less money circulating in the local economy, something which contributes to the picture of high streets across Scotland, where local businesses simply cannot continue.

Let us not forget that behind the economic data, this is a real story for people throughout Scotland. Entrepreneurs are risk takers, innovators and wealth creators. They need both our Governments to support them, but too often they are the victims of competing priorities. The UK Government have recognised the importance of increasing productivity, with the publication of the industrial strategy, and city deals are an important part of solving the productivity puzzle. The Glasgow city region deal is investing £44 million in East Renfrewshire. I was pleased to visit a number of the projects recently. City deals also demonstrate the benefits of Scotland's two Governments working together rather than pulling apart—we need a heck of a lot more of that.

Meanwhile, businesses in rural Scotland, including areas such as Eaglesham and Uplawmoor, continue to be hampered by poor broadband—a basic necessity in the 21st century. People across Scotland have been hit with a double whammy, as the SNP Government raise taxes on more than 1 million Scots—22,000 of them in my constituency—on top of significant council tax hikes. Local employers suffer under the highest business rates across Europe. I do not understand why the Scottish Government believe that when 80% of our economy is based in the service sector they can boost economic growth by taking more out of hard-working people's wallets.

The truth is that the Scottish economy needs a kick. It is flatlining and the Scottish Government's high-tax agenda may be the final straw. The UK Government have introduced various measures, including the national living wage, personal allowance increases and wider business initiatives, such as the industrial strategy, to help mitigate some of the damage, but they also can and should do more. We need a pragmatic approach and some better joined-up thinking between Scotland's two Governments. Nine successive quarters of declining activity in the construction sector, for example, is not acceptable. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley) dealt well with some of the challenges facing that sector.

Yesterday saw the departure from Holyrood of an Economic Secretary whose legacy is one of declining productivity, skills, job quality and investment, and an economy with one of the lowest GDP growth rates in the OECD. Scotland needs a Scottish Government prepared to invest and give businesses the opportunity and security they so desperately need. Roll on 2021, when we will finally get one.

3.8 pm

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing this important debate. What I am about to say might be slightly more boring than previous contributions to this debate.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): Never!

**Jamie Stone:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. I want to talk about the positive points of the Scottish economy, as well as some of the challenges we face. As always, I will turn hon. Member's eyes to my constituency in the far north.

First, I want to talk about food and drink. There is no doubt that we have great strengths in the highlands, particularly in my constituency. I will take a leaf out of the book of the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) and name some distilleries in my constituency, which make the most excellent products: Glenmorangie, Balblair, Dalmore, Clynelish and Old Pulteney in Wick. If we combine that with the quality of food that is offered, all the way from the Cocoa Mountain in Durness, which makes the most delicious hot chocolate, to The Albannach, which has one Michelin star, in Lochinver, and from Luigi's in Dornoch to Greens Market in Tain, we can offer a really good tourism product. The success of the north coast 500 is based on what we can offer. There is a message for a wider Scotland in that: if we can get these things right, we can boost the local economy.

**Christine Jardine:** Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment, in that although the highlands has successes, they could have been so much stronger had the Highlands and Islands Enterprise agency not been so undermined since 2007 by a Scottish national Government in Holyrood determined to centralise everything, including enterprise, and to tie HIE's hands behind its back?

**Jamie Stone:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Let us not forget that the Highlands and Islands Development Board, as it then was, was introduced by Harold Wilson's Labour Government because, as was said at the time, the highlands were on the conscience of the rest of Scotland. Anything that undermines enterprise today worries me greatly. Highlands and Islands Enterprise did some research some years ago looking at the word "highland" and what it means. It is synonymous with an unspoilt environment with a particularly special culture. In marketing terms, the word "highland" is a strong tool to use.

I turn to slightly more problematic areas. When I was growing up in the highlands, pretty much all my generation left the area to find employment. They went to England, or abroad. Some went to Canada. My father used to say to me, "When you leave school, you will go away to find work." Then Nigg came to Easter Ross and provided vital jobs. Some years earlier, Dounreay came to Caithness and offered the same, and the historical depopulation of the highlands, whereby our brightest and best left, was halted and reversed. I brought up my family in Easter Ross. They went to school there, and that might not have happened if I had not had employment at Nigg.

How do we replace that employment? Hopefully, the price of oil will recover, and Global may yet get the contracts we crave. In the case of Dounreay, we have to work out—for not only the local economy but the Scottish economy—how we replace those jobs with high-quality jobs that build on the skills that we have in Caithness and parts of Sutherland. That is a challenge for the Government. It can be done, but it will require a leap of faith at both Scottish and UK level to say, "Yes, we will put a nuclear reactor at Dounreay," or "Yes, we will approve putting in a big oil platform construction yard at Nigg." That is what I am looking for on that front.

We had a debate on upland farming yesterday. We need to add value to the farm product. Again, that is linked into the image of the highlands. Upland farming in any other part of Scotland has a clean environmental image that is crucial to marketing, so thought needs to be given to that.

Our towns' and cities' infrastructure has been mentioned. Let us not kid ourselves: we have a crisis in many of our town centres, which are dying before our very eyes. Once thriving high streets have far too many charity shops and similar. The issue of bank closures was touched on by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley). That has in no way helped what has been happening in our Scottish towns. I have made this plea before, but for the good of the economy, we should have some sort of one-stop shop, in which the Scottish clearing banks combine to provide a human face offering services at a counter. At the end of the day, a hole in the wall cannot provide the advice that people need.

[Jamie Stone]

The challenge for Government is to modernise banking. I have written several times to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ask whether a scheme could be introduced to stop the rot in our town centres. In the widest context of the Scottish economy, if our communities and town centres die, it not only shows rot in the economy, but damages our social infrastructure and our cohesion. With the best will and the best of intentions, we can head off those challenges, but we must all work together to deal with them.

3.14 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing this important debate on the future of Scotland's economy.

Scotland's GDP continues to languish in the doldrums and is not forecast to grow by more than 1% per year until at least 2023. A critical indicator of an economy's future success is the overall level of investment. In Scotland, although foreign investment is high, overall investment is low. That is not a healthy picture, and it is not a solely Scottish problem, but one that affects the entire UK economy. It is one of the key drivers of low productivity.

According to World Bank figures, investment in the UK from public and private sources sits at 17% of our GDP, which put us 118th in the world. The United States invests 20% of its economy, and Japan invests 24%. The arguments on the need to improve our levels of investment are well rehearsed, but I would like to focus on the need for a fully functioning, effectively organised UK national investment bank to shape the future of Scotland's economy, and to invest in enterprise—especially, of course, in Scotland. Let me strike a chord of bipartisanship here. I know the Scottish National party has a plan for a Scottish investment bank, and it is a worthy concept, but I want to advance the case for a UK national investment bank.

Jim McColl is one of Scotland's most successful business people and we should listen to him. He recently commissioned a report from University College London on the case for a UK national investment bank, and I recommend it as a thoroughly sound read. I would be very happy to supply every Member of the House with a digital copy of the report, from which I wish to make three quick points. First,

“By making strategic investments and nurturing new industrial landscapes, a modern industrial strategy focused on solving important societal challenges can help to rebalance the economy and reinvigorate the industrial base.”

Secondly,

“This requires not just any type of finance but patient, long-term, committed finance. This can take different forms, but in many countries, patient strategic finance is increasingly coming from state investment banks...By developing new financial tools and working closely with public and private stakeholders, state investment banks can—if structured effectively—play a leading role driving growth and innovation.”

Thirdly,

“The European Investment Bank...has long been a key source of finance for infrastructure projects in the UK, financing £7 billion of projects in 2016.”

As we leave the EU, we clearly need to consider options to replace the European Investment Bank.

A national investment bank of the type found in many European countries would ensure the availability of quality patient capital. Entrepreneurs have to have access to patient capital, because they need immediate investment for longer-term returns. If businesses do not have access to that quality of capital in our country, they move to where they can get it. If they do not physically move, the ideas that need to be nurtured by patient capital move, and we see the continuation of the old cycle. Britain, and Scotland in particular, is a magnificent nursery of imagination and creativity. New products and concepts start off on their journey of commercialisation on these shores, but end up being fully deployed and exploited somewhere else. That cycle must be broken for good, and the availability of patient capital is crucial.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman mentioned Jim McColl; I met him recently to discuss the future of commercial shipbuilding in Scotland. The example he cites is exactly the point that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. In Germany, they have access to patient finance and can finance the capital cost of a ship—up to £1 billion apiece—whereas in Scotland there is simply no facility for that. Does he not agree that a Scottish investment bank, although a laudable proposal, would not be on anywhere near the scale needed to achieve the massive industrial growth that we need?

**Stephen Kerr:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is why I am advocating, for the future of Scotland's economy, a UK investment bank. I have had many dealings with Jim McColl, and I agree with the direction of his argument.

Patient capital instils long-term support, builds confidence in the whole commercialisation process, from ideation to launch, and fosters the entrepreneurial spirit of our brightest and best. The return on patient capital invested is a measure of financial success, but when it comes to measuring social good, those things are exponentially better.

I prepared a much longer speech on this subject. I know the Minister might refer me to the British Business Bank, but to me it is not really operating to its full potential as an actual real bank. The resource available is too low. It is £200 million a year from the taxpayer for the whole UK economy; that will do little to address the investment shortfall in our economy. Essentially the British Business Bank needs to be reformed to become a real bank with the ability to issue bonds and raise funds.

Finally, in the interests of time—I might have already gone over my time limit, for which I apologise, Mrs Main—I want to ask the Minister a couple of simple questions as we consider the future of Scotland's economy. Do the Government accept that British businesses and entrepreneurs need an additional source of good quality patient capital—capital that is not currently available in any quantity? What is our Government's considered view on the proposition that the British Business Bank be converted into a fully functioning national investment bank, on the same basis as the national investment banks in other countries? To agree further with the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), Germany is an example: the KfW is worthy of close examination by the Government, especially as we leave the European Union and have to consider how we will support British businesses—and Scottish businesses in particular—to compete on the global scene.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call Mr Drew Hendry, I remind colleagues that I will call the Front Benchers at around half-past.

3.20 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing the debate, and share his disappointment that neither the Secretary of State for Scotland nor any of his team turned out for the debate.

I should like to give some uncommon—

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Drew Hendry:** I was just about to give the hon. Gentleman some praise—but carry on.

**Stephen Kerr:** It is a well-known convention in the House that no Secretary of State or Cabinet Minister responds to debates in Westminster Hall, and the point that the hon. Gentleman made was not entirely fair.

**Drew Hendry:** If the hon. Gentleman had been listening to what I said, he would know I said “or any of his team”. [*Interruption.*]

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order.

**Drew Hendry:** It is such a shame: I was going to offer some unusual, uncommon praise for the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), with whom I commonly duel across the Chamber, where we fervently disagree. However, his speech today was unusually positive. It may have been slightly off track, as he admitted, but judging by its tone he was at least looking for some opportunity.

I would also almost make an honourable exception of the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone). Until he took an intervention, which unfortunately did not point out that Highlands and Islands Enterprise still operates exactly as it did in the past, or mention the new south of Scotland enterprise agency to go with it, he was talking about Scotland's strengths. Otherwise, what a desperate collection of speeches talking Scotland down—

**Christine Jardine** *rose*—

**Jamie Stone** *rose*—

**Drew Hendry:** I will not give way just now. We are short of time.

Scotland has strong economic fundamentals. We heard nothing about its vast natural resources, the innovation there, or the talent of our people. Scotland has the most inward investment of anywhere in the UK outside London.

**Luke Graham:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Drew Hendry:** I am going to make some progress.

That inward investment is happening in the face of Tory austerity, during which time the Scottish Government have focused on building an economy of the future—taking measures to unlock innovation and drive productivity. As we have heard today, productivity is the key, but what we have not heard today is how UK productivity has flatlined for the past decade. As economists will agree, productivity is not everything, but it is almost everything, to an economy.

The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) talked about the city deals, but not about how, for example, when one of those deals was put together in Inverness, the Scottish Government put in £135 million and the UK Government—in a so-called partnership—put in only £52 million.

**Christine Jardine:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Drew Hendry:** No, I am not going to give way. I am going to make some progress; there is limited time in the debate.

The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire also talked about the Scottish Government having a surplus this year. The Scottish Government work with a fixed budget; they cannot overrun on that. Other Members have mentioned Governments working together, but the present Tory Government cannot even work with the other parties in the Scottish Parliament on Brexit, so how can they be trusted to work with the Scottish Government? The other falsehood—I am sorry, I will take back that word. The other erroneous suggestion made was that Scotland is under a high-tax agenda. That was to forget conveniently that 70% of people in Scotland now pay less tax than they did last year.

The biggest threat to Scotland's economy comes from the Tory Government's reckless—[*Interruption.*]

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Gentleman's comments will be heard. Hon. Members will please refrain from barracking.

**Drew Hendry:** Thank you, Mrs Main.

The biggest threat to Scotland's economy comes from the Tory Government's reckless obsession with a hard Brexit. That is not being challenged by the Labour Front Benchers. We have no protection from it. The Scottish Government have put forward, in “Scotland's Place in Europe”, an option to enable Scotland to avoid the worst effects and stay in the single market and customs union. Incidentally, this week the EU chief negotiator Guy Verhofstadt said that that would be entirely acceptable. Scotland is likely to be hammered by a hard Brexit.

**Christine Jardine:** On that point—

**Drew Hendry:** No, I am going to make progress. The Fraser of Allander Institute estimates that 80,000 jobs are at risk.

**Paul Masterton:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Drew Hendry:** No, I am going to carry on, because I have only a minute.

The UK Government are paying no real attention to stimulating the oil and gas industry. Fortunately there is now an upturn in oil and gas prices, and we need investment from the UK Government.

[Drew Hendry]

I have much more to say, and as we are the third party in Parliament I should have hoped for more time to say it, but unfortunately that is not the case—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Gentleman is not under a time limit. I was just indicating that other colleagues wish to speak.

**Drew Hendry:** In that case I will keep going; thank you very much for allowing me to do that.

**Jamie Stone:** I would not want the hon. Gentleman to misunderstand me. I do not decry the efforts being made by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. However, anyone who thinks that despite its best efforts it is more than a poor shadow of what went before, in the Highlands and Islands Development Board, is in dreamland. Surely hon. Members agree with me about that.

**Drew Hendry:** I disagree, and so do many businesses that I interact with in the highlands on a daily basis.

Production efficiency in the oil sector has risen for the fifth consecutive year, reaching 74% in 2017, demonstrating sustained efficiency improvements and maximising the economic recovery. Oil & Gas UK's "Business Outlook for 2018" shows growth in investment and a further 5% increase in the forecast production for that year. Recent industry announcements about BP's successful working discoveries in the Capercaillie and Achmelvich wells and Shell's redevelopment of the Penguins field demonstrate the investment potential that the UK fields still hold. Over the next decade our oil and gas sector can capitalise on the decommissioning market, which is forecast to reach £17 billion; but that is only if the right decisions on investment are made.

**John Lamont:** The hon. Gentleman points out the challenges for the oil and gas sector, but on Monday when the Scottish Affairs Committee was taking evidence on the sector in Aberdeen, we heard people saying they wanted fracking to be expanded in Scotland. Does he support the industry in making that call?

**Drew Hendry:** I certainly do not support fracking. I do not believe that a country as rich in natural resources and renewable energy as we are—and indeed one with the oil and gas industry that we have at the moment—needs to go for fracking. I absolutely support the ban on fracking in Scotland. [HON. MEMBERS: "There is no ban!"] There is a ban in Scotland. As to an effective ban, a court ruled in the past week that that is the case: fracking cannot go ahead in Scotland under the current situation.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Unfortunately I am a bit late to the debate, but I have been paying attention. I am amazed by the efforts of Conservative Members, in relation to thinking of Scotland as a country. They are the people who want to see Scotland as a region. [Interruption.] They should remember that the Norwegians have an oil fund, whereas they have squandered Scotland's oil.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Gentleman should resume his seat. He was not making an intervention, but engaging in a debate with the Opposition. He attended the debate very late.

**Drew Hendry:** Thank you, Mrs Main.

The other issue I wanted to touch on was the opportunity for carbon capture and storage development in Scotland. There is a measure of co-operation between the UK and Scottish Governments, but there is nowhere near the required level of ambition from the UK Government. The rug was pulled out from under Peterhead, where £1 billion of investment was supposed to be put into the carbon capture and storage operation. At the time, that was judged to be just about enough. Now, the UK Government's overall investment in carbon capture and storage is set to be about £100 million, which is desperately insufficient for the needs of the carbon capture industry, and nowhere near the amount needed to show the ambition that we should be showing to lead that industry. I will draw my remarks to a close, and I thank you, Mrs Main, for allowing me the extra time.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** The hon. Gentleman was not on a time limit. With the permission of the Front Benchers, I will take four extra minutes from them and place a two-minute time limit on the last two Back-Bench Members, who have been here for the entire debate.

3.30 pm

**Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con):** I will be brief. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing this debate. He started with a tattie point, which was repeated by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). A UK Minister is present to respond on the UK Government's behalf, and I do not see any problem with that.

The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West said that in his speech, he would mention a third way—a Labour way—and I was excited about that, because on Monday night, the small rump of Scottish Labour MPs voted three different ways in the Heathrow debate. Some voted for it, some voted against it, and others joined the Scottish National party in sitting on their hands. In a debate about the future of Scotland's economy, it is interesting that not a single SNP Member who has spoken or intervened has mentioned their last-minute decision to change their mind about Heathrow on orders from Nicola Sturgeon and to stop the investment into Scotland's jobs and economy.

**Drew Hendry:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Douglas Ross:** The hon. Gentleman spoke for 10 minutes; I cannot take an intervention from him.

SNP Members sat on their hands and abstained, despite talking in the debate about all the positive interventions that would come to Scotland as a result of Heathrow's expansion.

It is good that some SNP MSPs can speak out against their party. My hon. Friends have quoted a report, "Scotland's Economic Performance", by a cross-party committee of the Scottish Parliament and supported by SNP MSPs, which says:

"Levels of GDP growth are marginal; productivity is low and wages are stagnant."

**Angus Brendan MacNeil:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Douglas Ross:** No—I will not give way to some Johnny-come-lately.

Eleven years of SNP power in Scotland have resulted in its own MSPs criticising it. We have two Governments in Scotland—a UK Government and a Scottish Government—who should be working together, but all we get from the SNP is its obsession with independence and picking fights with Westminster, rather than standing up for my Moray constituents and others.

3.32 pm

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing this debate.

After a decade of the Scottish National party and eight years of a Conservative Government, what will the future of Scotland's economy be? Where are the jobs, the finance and the security for our next generation of young workers as we enter the uncharted waters of life outside the European Union? After a recent trip to Brussels, we were told that Brexit is over. In Europe, we have already left—only the paperwork has to be filled in. Deal or no deal, we are out of the European market.

Section 11 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 should have been fixed in time for Scotland's voice to be heard, but without the SNP's approval, and with a Tory party that could not make amends or recommendations, the buck was passed to the House of Lords. The SNP could only huff and puff and walk out of the House for five minutes as it was blowing down, with their instructions to walk out following behind them.

I sympathise with the Scottish Government, who, like us, waited on our amendments to section 11. For the Tories to fail to deliver on the will of the Scottish people puts our devolution settlement at risk, with fewer powers and a breakdown between the two Governments.

What will the future of the economy be when we have low wages, fewer working hours, temporary jobs, agency work and, of course—the way to get unemployment figures down—zero-hours contracts? What chance do our Scottish youth have of building a future, securing housing, raising a family or providing for themselves before caring for others? It really is a game of survival. In 2018, it is sad that the only growth and development in Scotland is in food banks.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Before I call the SNP spokesperson, Alison Thewliss, I ask her to try to confine her remarks to eight minutes.

3.34 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I will try, Mrs Main. It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair. I thank the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) for securing this spirited debate. Hon. Members have lots of ideas about the Scottish economy, which is always something to welcome.

I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's analysis of a decade of lost opportunity. It is no coincidence that that decade has also seen Tory austerity writ large and a financial crash caused by the previous Westminster

Administration. We have had to put up with the consequences and do the best we can with one hand tied behind our back.

**Ged Killen:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Alison Thewliss:** My time is constrained, and there are a couple of hon. Members I want to mention, but I will try to take an intervention from the hon. Gentleman if I can.

I would also take issue with anybody who says that the Scottish National party has a lack of ambition; we could not have more ambition for our country than to take control of all the financial levers to improve the conditions for our people. With the powers of independence, that is exactly what we would do.

Scotland's economy is performing relatively well on many indicators. It is a country with many economic strengths: it is an attractive place to work, live and conduct business.

**Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): The end of property business rates relief in Aberdeen is doing a lot of damage to the business community, which is having, essentially, to knock down buildings. Does the hon. Lady agree that that policy went too far, and that there have been consequences that the Scottish Government did not foresee? Would she recommend that Scottish Government Ministers reverse it?

**Alison Thewliss:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has made those representations to the Minister and that the Minister will take them on board.

We have one of the lowest youth unemployment rates, not just in the UK, but in the whole of the EU. We have been described as the most highly qualified population anywhere in Europe, and we are the most successful part of the UK outside London when it comes to attracting foreign investment. Our exports have gone up 44.7% under the SNP, to more than £29.8 billion in 2016, which is no small feat. Scotland was the only part of the UK where employment went up in the last year.

We have a well-deserved international reputation in a range of growth sectors of the economy, such as life sciences, the creative industries, and food and drink, as the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) mentioned. Those sectors are an asset to our country. We are also making great strides in renewable energy. Through Scottish Enterprise, we have invested an additional £45 million in business research over the next three years.

There is no doubt that Scotland is a wealthy nation, but challenges remain. Like other advanced economies, we face long-term structural inequality. The Glasgow Centre for Population Health has found that the decisions taken by the Tory Government in the 1980s are still having repercussions. [Interruption.] The post-industrial impact that hon. Members on the Government side are chortling about has had a long-term effect on my constituents and constituents across Scotland.

It is not only possible to grow the economy while tackling that inequality; it is absolutely imperative. The type of growth that is built on the backs of the poorest and most vulnerable, and that comes at the expense of the environment, is almost not worth having.

[Alison Thewliss]

The OECD estimates that, between 1990 and 2010, rising income inequality in the UK reduced our economic output per head by 9%. Inequality stunts economic growth, and Scotland is no exception. It is time to shift the focus of the debate away from short-term reckless growth and towards a more sustainable model built on inclusion, dignity and respect. Economic choices are not just about the bottom line; they should reflect the society that we want to live in.

My colleagues in the Scottish Government have received international attention for the work they have done so far on inclusive growth. Putting that at the heart of our economic strategy has led to different outcomes in Scotland. We want to make choices such as a Scottish national investment bank, and I am glad that the hon. Members for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) and for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) welcome that. The hon. Member for Stirling mentioned KfW, a bank in Germany that I visited when I was on the Communities and Local Government Committee. It was set up as part of the Marshall plan in 1945. We know that it works, but we have never done the same for ourselves. It makes absolute sense for us to do that, and it is interesting that the hon. Gentleman looks to pinch the Scottish Government's ideas for the UK. There should be more of that in future—why not?

We are also researching a citizen's basic income, and we invest in human capital by keeping university tuition free for all. We also pay better in Scotland. We have more living wage employers per head than anywhere else in the UK, and we seek the real living wage, not the Tories' pretendy living wage, which has age discrimination baked into it. Although the Labour party might wish to have a £10 living wage, it did not give the Scottish Government power over that policy; we asked for the devolution of employment law, and it stood firmly against that.

Like the rest of the UK, Scotland has an ageing population. It is great that people are living longer, but it presents several challenges to our economy—not least an increased old-age dependency ratio. With fewer working-age people in proportion to the number of older people, tax revenues become lower and public spending on pensions and healthcare becomes higher. That makes it more difficult to keep public finances stable for the future. There are two ways to improve the situation. One is to increase labour market participation, which we are trying to do. We have created free childcare services, which are a known driver for getting women into work. Increased female employment has also been linked to higher productivity, to economies that are more resilient to recession, and to a multitude of improvements to health and wellbeing outcomes.

The other way to protect our economy from the problems arising from an ageing population is to increase immigration. The Tories have stood against devolving immigration law to Scotland, despite our particular circumstances, which the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West recognised in his speech. Immigration law is a reserved matter. At constituency surgeries every single Friday, I see the impact of a Government keen to decrease immigration and ignore the large net contribution to our economy of those who choose to come and make their home in Scotland. I see the devastating effects of a

hostile environment created by a UK Government Home Office hellbent on reducing migration for no economic purpose whatever. That includes the highly skilled migrants group, on behalf of which I have been campaigning. They come here, pay taxes and have not taken a day's benefits in their life, yet the Government see fit to deport them for making entirely legitimate changes to their tax returns.

**Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con):** At the Home Affairs Committee yesterday, we had experts in. We questioned them on a separate immigration policy. They used the word “shambles” directly to describe having a separate immigration policy in any region of the United Kingdom. Does the hon. Lady agree that the SNP should maybe start listening to experts? We would then see the best outcomes for Scotland.

**Alison Thewliss:** Coming from the party that regularly likes to run down experts and their views, that is a bit rich. What is a shambles is the situation I see for my constituents week in, week out. Their lives are made an absolute misery by the Home Office. My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) has been to Canada and has spoken about how a differentiated immigration policy can work in practice. There is no reason why Scotland cannot do that.

**Christine Jardine:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Alison Thewliss:** No, I am conscious of time, and I am running out of it. It is estimated that each additional EU migrant working in Scotland pays £10,400 in tax towards our NHS and other public services. The Fraser of Allander Institute at the University of Strathclyde used advanced modelling techniques to estimate the impact of reduced migration after Brexit on Scotland's economy. In its Brexit scenario, aggregate GDP is 9% lower by 2065, all other things held constant.

If there is one thing that is certain for Scotland after Brexit, it is that all other things will not be held constant. It is estimated by the Scottish Government that leaving the single market—a position backed by both the Conservatives and Labour—will reduce output by 8.5% by 2030, which is equivalent to a loss of £2,300 a year for each person in Scotland. Of course, the UK Government do not agree with the figure, having conducted their own analysis of the impact of Brexit on Scotland's economy. Their analysis presents an even worse scenario, with output reduced by 9% over the next 15 years.

We are at a crucial point in determining the future of our economy. We have to take into account that we are having Brexit as a result of an internal debate within the Conservative party that got out of hand. Only one party has a clear and meaningful vision for the future of Scotland's economy: the SNP. We have looked at the issue. We have the Sustainable Growth Commission, a suite of recommendations and a robust plan for the type of Scotland we would like to see. The report calls for more investment to grow Scotland's economy by increasing population, participation and productivity. Some of that can be done now, but some of it cannot. We require cross-party support for some of the things we want to see, whether that is devolving some of those powers to Scotland to let us get on with the job, or whether it is independence, where we could have the full suite of powers without having one hand tied behind

our back. Through that, we could make changes for the benefit of all our population, not just the Tories and their cronies.

3.43 pm

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mrs Main. I start by thanking my good friend and comrade, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen), for securing this debate and for making a speech that cut to the very heart of the problems that will face the Scottish economy in the decades to come.

With the impending threat of Brexit and the threat of a second Scottish independence referendum always on the horizon, it strikes me that once again people in Scotland are caught in a vice between two Governments who are absolutely intent on causing them economic harm in pursuit of their own nationalist and constitutionally driven agendas. We have seen that writ large today. It is not about talking Scotland down. In fact, speeches today have reflected the passion that Members have for standing up for their constituents and their economic interests. My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley) talked about the real issue of the massive job cuts her constituents face. Calling that “talking Scotland down” does a real disservice to Members in this Chamber.

People in Scotland have been let down on two counts over the past 10 years. First, a UK Government have taken the political choice—I emphasise that it is a choice—to implement austerity. Secondly, a Scottish Government, rather than use the powers they have to alleviate and mitigate those austerity measures, have consistently chosen to use the Scottish Parliament as a conveyor belt simply to pass that austerity on and, indeed, amplify it at the local government level. That is not what the Scottish Parliament was meant to be and not what those of us on these Benches who fought long and hard for its creation envisaged.

We envisaged a Parliament in Edinburgh that would be a bulwark against Tory austerity, would stand up and be counted and would chose a different path. Trends show that the Scottish economy is lagging behind that of the rest of the UK in terms of growth, productivity and employment. In 2017, growth stood at just 0.8%, while the Scottish Fiscal Commission predicts that growth will remain at less than 1% until 2024—something that the Fraser of Allander Institute has labelled as “unprecedented in a generation”. It is the slowest period of long-term growth in the Scottish economy in over 60 years.

I would of course like to caveat that with the fact that statistics released this morning show that growth has increased by 0.2% during the first quarter of 2018, which is slightly higher than in the UK as a whole. That news is of course welcome, but I should like to think that everyone in the room today would like to see improvement and would agree that the long-term growth trend remains insufficient. Productivity was mentioned by several Members, and it has dropped by 2.2% in the past year alone. It is a fundamental economic principle that to generate economic growth, a country must increase productivity. To increase productivity, two very important factors must be addressed: investment and an interventionist industrial strategy.

Scotland’s productivity ranks in the third quartile of OECD countries, and the rate of productivity growth in Scotland lags behind that of many of our competitors. To catch up, Scotland must expedite a significant increase in its rate of productivity growth. Achieving the required growth would be truly transformational for the Scottish economy. Increasing Scotland’s productivity to the level of the top quartile of OECD countries would grow GDP by almost £45 billion, which is an increase of 30%. Annual average wages would be more £6,500 higher, which is an increase of 25%. That is the prize if we can address the structural problem.

Just 10 businesses in Scotland account for 45% of all private sector R&D activity in Scotland. Almost 70% of R&D investment is by non-Scottish-owned businesses. Despite higher education R&D rates in Scotland being among the highest in the world, we have seen a significant disconnect between academic innovation and its application by industry in Scotland. There is obvious potential to increase industrial interaction with higher education, and addressing that is a major focus of the innovation centres, such as the advanced forming research centre, that were set up by the last Labour Government.

Much work is still to be done. To match the rate of the top quartile of OECD countries, business R&D investment in Scotland would need to be 90% higher—an increase of £10 billion a year. Companies that are looking to grow are not considering external funding, and that raises questions about the level of growth ambition and whether ambitions can be achieved through internal funding alone. Poor competitiveness in productivity, innovation and capital investment also hinder the scope to drive export sales and grow overall industrial production. Around 60% of Scottish small and medium-sized enterprises trade only within Scotland. Scotland’s exports are also highly concentrated. Just 15 businesses account for 30% of all international exports, and 70 firms account for 50%. Scotland’s key international export markets remain Europe and the USA, with sales to emerging markets relatively low, and five sectors account for 50% of exports in Scotland.

Labour is absolutely committed to addressing the problems we see in our growth and productivity levels, not only in Scotland, but across the entirety of the UK. In our manifesto, we detailed the investment we would make in economic development in the event of a UK Labour Government. In Scotland, that would mean £70 billion over a 10-year period: £20 billion through our proposals to enhance the Scottish Investment Bank, providing patient long-term finance to industry, which the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) mentioned; £20 billion through our national transformation fund; and £30 billion that Scotland would benefit from through enhanced Barnett consequentials. If the hon. Gentleman is so enthusiastic about Labour policies, I encourage him to consider crossing the Floor, instead of having to lobby his Ministers for the same policies.

Scottish Labour has also committed to a proper industrial strategy, which has unfortunately been sorely lacking in the UK and Scottish Governments’ plans. Our industrial strategy would generate high-skilled, high-quality, stable employment for men and women. It would encourage a diversification of ownership models and the governance of our industrial base, encourage and actively support the role of trade unions in the economy, and recognise and resource the critical role of innovation in developing sectors of our economy.

[Mr Paul Sweeney]

Critical to all those pledges is the investment I spoke about. We must recognise that the role of a Government is to be an enabler—part of a triple helix of private entrepreneurs, research-led universities and an entrepreneurial state, assisting where there is potential to develop sectors, create new high-skilled, high-paid jobs, and sustain and grow viable enterprises.

We must never forget the human cost of failing to address those issues, of a stagnating economy that results in unemployment, and of an economy that is propped up by low-skilled, low-paid jobs, meaning that we have the scandalous situation in which 52% of all adults living in poverty in Scotland are in employment. Whether people like it or not, it is a fact that the UK economy is propped up by low-skilled, low-paid jobs. The Office for National Statistics recently indicated that the number of zero-hours contracts has increased to 1.8 million. That is 1.8 million workers across the UK who do not know what their income will be from week to week. Is that really the way we want our economy to function—built on the back of low-paid and insecure work?

That takes me back to the points I made about our industrial strategy. We have been explicit in our desire to ban zero-hours contracts on the basis that they are exploitative and ensure that our economy is skewed in favour of big business while ordinary working people suffer. If we were in any doubt about the truth of that, we need only to look at the Scottish Fiscal Commission's findings, which state that real wages are lower today than they were in 2010 and are predicted to continue falling this year. It is simply not good enough.

While the UK Government and the Scottish Government bicker over constitutional intricacies, people are struggling to feed their children. According to the Child Poverty Action Group, more than 230,000 children in Scotland live in poverty. Just let that sink in for a second: one in every four children in Scotland is in poverty today. That should shame every single one of us.

We are on the cusp of a great opportunity, with the fourth industrial revolution now under way. One of the great achievements in Scotland under the last Labour Government was to reverse Scotland's historical population decline, but there is so much more to do. We need to enhance population growth in Scotland. In 1902, the Scottish Registrar General predicted that by 1962 the Scottish population would be 10 million. Clearly we never achieved that, so we have a great opportunity to make up for lost ground.

We are on the cusp of that opportunity. That is why I am proud to stand here today as a Labour MP who can say that when there is a UK Labour Government and a Labour Government in Scotland we will address the inequalities in our society and the structural problems that we have identified in today's debate. It is time for the UK Government and the Scottish Government to stop burying their heads in the sand when it comes to such issues purely because they are deemed too difficult to deal with.

We are ready to govern this country in a way that works for the many, not the few. If others are not, I have one message: call a general election and let us get on with it, because we are ready to invest in Scotland and

to ensure that Scotland's economy and people do not suffer anymore due to the short-sighted nature of their current Governments.

3.52 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) on securing the debate. I am sorry that he is not as pleased to see me as I am to respond to the debate. I point out to him that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) said, I am a UK Minister. I am proud of being part of a Unionist UK Government, and I will work with my colleagues—and colleagues across the Floor—from Scotland just as much as I will work with colleagues from Wales and, indeed, from my own constituency.

**Mr Sweeney:** Will the Minister give way?

**Stuart Andrew:** No—I have very little time, in fairness, and I want to get through quite a few of the points that have been raised. This has been a very good and lively debate. I said it was a pleasure to be here. At the beginning of it, I was thinking, “What have I walked into?” However, it is a pleasure.

A fundamental change is going on in the global economy that will throw up both opportunities and challenges for Scotland and the rest of the UK. Automation, artificial intelligence, growing digital connectivity and the need to deliver environmentally sustainable growth will profoundly affect the way that we do business, how businesses function and how people work. As we plan for Scotland's economic future, the UK Government are confident that Scotland is well placed to take advantage of the changes that will affect the entire economy. Scotland is an open and enterprising nation, with some of the best universities and research institutions in the world. As part of the UK, it has a global reputation for welcoming businesses with high standards, respected institutions and a strong rule of law.

It is the job of Government to ensure that business is ready to respond to change, and that is why we have created the industrial strategy, which is incredibly important. Through the four grand challenges that we have identified, the UK can become a global technological revolution leader in clean growth, artificial intelligence and big data, the future of mobility, and meeting the needs of an ageing society—something that the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) rightly mentioned.

In all those areas, Scotland can make a fantastic contribution. Edinburgh is becoming one of the UK's most important clusters for AI and digital technology. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has announced an AI sector deal, bringing around £1 billion of investment through public and industry funding. That will ensure that it is a vibrant sector and has the resources and structures in place to survive.

I am pleased that we have already made an announcement about the construction industry, which the hon. Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley) rightly highlighted. We will report back later in the year, once all the details have been agreed. I am glad that she raised that. Equally, there is the food and drink sector, which the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West mentioned.

I am conscious that time is going fast, and I want to respond to some of the issues that were raised. The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West talked about a “third way”. We heard that before with the previous Labour Government, which landed us with a £150 billion deficit. This Government have had to work hard to get that deficit down, which has not been easy. The Opposition Front Bencher, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), said that those are “choices”. It is the reality of ensuring that we have an economy that is balanced and in which people have confidence, so that we can get the investment we need to create the growth that has brought millions of new jobs for people in this country. We are seeing record levels of employment. That is a record of which I am proud.

**Mr Sweeney:** Will the Minister give way?

**Stuart Andrew:** No, I am not taking any interventions, because I am very conscious of time.

Brexit was also mentioned. I have heard it said time and time again that the Government are hell bent on a hard Brexit. If anything, we are hell bent on ensuring that we get a deal that works for the UK and the EU. I have faith in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She has achieved agreements when the media and people in this House thought that she could not. Let us have faith in her and support her as she goes to the June Council, and I am sure that we will have a Brexit deal that will work.

I agreed with what the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West said about the deficit in Scotland. It is concerning that as a share of GDP the deficit is 8.3% in Scotland, compared with 2.4% for the rest of the UK. That needs to be addressed. Not dealing with the deficit really knocks confidence. People in business will not be confident if it is not being dealt with properly.

We also heard about low wages. I remind hon. Members that it was this Government that dealt with the personal allowance, which is benefiting some 2.5 million Scots’

wage packets. We have increased the minimum wage to a living wage—from £5.80, as it was in 2010, to £7.83—bringing £4,000 a year more to the lowest paid in the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) was right to show the differing figures, comparing the UK performance with the Scottish performance. We on this side are determined to work with the Scottish Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland worked closely with the former Economy Secretary in Scotland. That needs to continue.

Some of the comments that have been made today are absolutely right. We have challenges ahead of us, but we also have opportunities. As we can now develop trading agreements around the world, I want us to expand that for the whole of the UK, so that every part of the UK can benefit. Scotland is as important a part of this nation as any other.

As I said, the hon. Member for Midlothian was right to talk about the construction industry. She talked about overthrowing capitalism being a bigger issue. I would say that, yes, it certainly is—and one that would seriously damage the economy of this country. I hope that people will take note.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) talked about a UK investment bank. We are always open to positive proposals to support the economy. The UK Government will consider any such proposal, ensuring that it offers value for money. I will ensure that I raise those points with colleagues in the Treasury following today’s debate.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) said that we were talking Scotland down. We are determined to ensure that our economy works for every part of the UK, and we are working with the oil and gas industry to ensure that there is a sector deal. In the last 10 seconds I have, I say to the SNP that constant talk of independence does nothing to give confidence to business to invest in the UK.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## BAME Blood, Stem Cell and Organ Donation

[SIR HENRY BELLINGHAM *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered BAME blood, stem cell and organ donation.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I first became aware of the issue of blood, stem cell and organ donation within black, Asian, mixed race and minority ethnic communities when I met Poonam Shah, who works in my constituency. Poonam's husband, Rakesh, died from a blood disorder at the age of just 35. Due to Rakesh's Indian heritage, he struggled to find a donor with the 10 matching genes that would have helped ensure that his blood would accept the donor's cells. Eventually, an anonymous donor with eight out of 10 matches was found from South Africa for Rakesh, who had a stem cell transplant in October 2014.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I am very pleased that my hon. Friend has secured this important debate. I should declare that I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on stem cell transplantation. My hon. Friend makes a point that is particularly relevant for the BAME community—often the donor will come from outside the UK. There have been a number of cases where there have been difficulties with visas. Time is vital in this area and we need a fast-track process to make sure that those people can get here as quickly as possible.

**Mohammad Yasin**: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I recognise the work that he has done as the chair of the APPG on stem cells. This is a very important issue, and that is why we are having this debate today.

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Those from the BAME community make up 5% of blood donors, yet they make up 14% of the population. The Imam Hussain Blood Donation Campaign was set up in my own city of Manchester; it has had a tremendous success rate of 3,408 donations. To be successful, it is important to ensure that cultural initiatives such as that are taken, so that we can carry on with improvements. If not, we will carry on experiencing difficulties.

**Mohammad Yasin**: My hon. Friend makes an important point and I will refer to similar points later in my speech.

Sadly, despite receiving a transplant, Rakesh's condition, MDS, was so advanced that he died in December 2014, leaving Poonam and their two young children. After Rakesh's death, Poonam decided to raise funds for Anthony Nolan and raise awareness among people from south Asia and other ethnic minority backgrounds about stem cell donations.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese** (Slough) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Does he agree that Health Ministers should work more closely with grassroots and community organisations? Currently, donors from Asian or other minority ethnic backgrounds make up just 15% of the stem cell register, but campaigns

such as Cure Kaiya, which held an event in my constituency, and Match4Rajie are encouraging more people from BAME backgrounds to become registered donors.

**Mohammad Yasin**: My hon. Friend makes a very important point.

In November, Poonam's fundraising efforts were recognised when she was awarded individual fundraiser of the year. I was so inspired by her story that I wanted to help raise awareness of the issue in BAME communities, because none of us know whether we or one of our loved ones might be a name on that list in need of a match, desperately waiting for a lifesaving opportunity. The reality is that many patients will not receive the stem cell transplant they need, because either there is no donor available or a donor cannot be found quickly enough. Only 20% of BAME patients receive the best possible match, compared with 69% of white, northern European patients.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this matter forward. I have always supported the issue of organ transplants, including for BAME people. With only six out of every 100 people who have signed up to the NHS organ donor register having told us that they are from black, Asian or minority ethnic communities, does the hon. Gentleman feel as I feel that when it comes to organ donation, every race is needed and we should urge the Minister to respond with a focused campaign for BAME donation? That is the best way forward and I think the Minister needs to do that.

**Mohammad Yasin**: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point. The disparity urgently needs to be addressed and I therefore welcome the very timely review by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith) on BAME stem cell and organ donation.

The problem of insufficient blood, stem cell and organ donation is fundamentally one of supply and demand. According to the review, fewer than 5% of donors who gave blood in the past year were from BAME communities, although the BAME group makes up around 14% of the total UK population. Currently, only 1% of people who give blood in England are black. BAME people are unequally affected by that, as they are subject to a higher demand and shorter supply than other groups. The most common blood diseases that affect BAME communities are thalassaemia and sickle cell disease.

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. While we know that there are problems and that there is much still to do, will he join me in congratulating Kanya King and the MOBO Awards on all the great campaigning work that they do to increase BAME blood and organ donation? They do an excellent job. Will he also join me in encouraging other organisations and companies with existing BAME reach to campaign in a similar manner?

**Mohammad Yasin**: I agree with the hon. Lady. BAME donors make up 15% of the stem cell register; black donors make up just 1.2% of potential donors on the British Bone Marrow Registry. I hope the Minister shares my

concerns about those statistics and that she will commit today to agreeing in full to the recommendations of the review by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West.

**Eleanor Smith** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this timely debate. My review, “Ending the Silent Crisis”, is about the lack of stem cell and organ donation in black and minority ethnic groups. I hope that the Minister will look at the review’s recommendations, take them on board and come back to us on them.

**Mohammad Yasin:** I thank my hon. Friend for her hard work on the review and I look forward to working together on the issue.

It is clear that increasing the number of BAME stem cell donors requires a many-sided approach, but one of the most important things that can be done is to integrate information about donation into the formal curriculum, which the review recommends. We already know that education works. For example, Anthony Nolan and other blood disorder charities have had great success working with schools, universities and colleges across the UK. Just last month, I wrote a letter to all schools with a sixth form in or near my constituency to ask whether they would consider using an assembly or personal, social, health and economic lessons to teach students about the importance of donating stem cells, blood and organs. I am delighted that one of the schools has already agreed to do so.

Since the Hero Project started in 2009, more than 32,000 people have signed up to the Anthony Nolan stem cell donor register, and approximately 16% of them are from a BAME background. The Hero Project recognises that the different religious views about organ donation are one of the barriers preventing people from signing up to the organ donation register. Anthony Nolan and other blood disorder charities recognise and respect those diverse views and tailor their message to suit different interpretations of faith. They focus on what people can do to help, not on what they cannot do.

The review found that the three main barriers that prevent people from signing up are a lack of knowledge or awareness, religious permissibility and a lack of trust in medical institutions. The opt-out system for organ and tissue donation, with additional safeguards, is welcome, but there must be an awareness campaign that is mindful of the cultural sensitivities relating to organ donation and addresses the significant pressure on NHS Blood and Transplant’s capacity to accommodate any rise in organ donations.

It is vital that we get more young people from BAME backgrounds, such as students, to sign up to the stem cell donor register, because the research shows that the younger the donor, the more likely the patient is to survive. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that all students aged 16 and above have the opportunity to learn about the importance of donating stem cells, blood and organs? There is a real desire in the BAME community—especially among the younger generation—to turn this issue around.

I was touched by the action of the Bandhan Bedford Group, a group of Asian professional women in my constituency who helped to add 300 new names to the stem cell register. They organised a stem cell drive this month in Bedford, with support from the blood cancer

charity DKMS, to help Kaiya Patel, a five-year-old girl who I understand is still waiting for a lifesaving match for her rare and aggressive form of leukaemia. I know that similar drives are taking place around the country, but this is a race against time. It has been reported that, to have a chance, Kaiya needs a transplant within the next two months.

There is a strong will out there to increase the life chances of people from a BAME background. I hope that this timely review, which highlights the scale of this silent crisis, is enough to spur the Government into assisting communities with a more co-ordinated approach. This blatant inequality must end.

4.13 pm

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) for securing this debate on an issue that is so important to my constituents in Hampstead and Kilburn. I will speak briefly.

More than 2,000 incredible people from Hampstead and Kilburn are on the Anthony Nolan stem cell register, a large proportion of whom are from BAME backgrounds. I mention that fact because, as Members from across the House have said, only 20% of patients from BAME backgrounds will get a perfect match, compared with 69% of people from white northern European backgrounds.

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): I declare an interest: my husband had a stem cell transplant three years ago. His donor came from this country. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we are to meet the needs of BAME patients who require a stem cell transplant, we must work with international registers? Increasing BAME donation in the UK alone is not enough. Some 60% of UK patients already receive stem cell transplants from international donors. That is made possible by Anthony Nolan’s incredible volunteer couriers, who collect donated stem cells around the world and transport them to patients. I hope the Minister will explain what steps the Government will take to support international registers.

**Tulip Siddiq:** My hon. Friend has stolen one of the questions I was going to ask the Minister, but I will forgive her.

In 2016, a young woman in my constituency called Lara, who was 27 years old and from a BAME background, needed a stem cell donor. The constituency snapped into action and organised the Match4Lara campaign. Elana Wall and Jacob Haddad, the volunteer co-ordinators for Anthony Nolan, co-ordinated 40 volunteers who spent their evenings packing spit kits and organising spit drives and spit drive socials. I went to a spit drive in the O2 Centre on Finchley Road, and I was impressed by the enthusiasm of the youngsters—especially those from a BAME background—who realised that if they took the spit test on the spot, there was a chance they could save a life. My younger sister, Azmina, participated and said that she found the science very accessible. She understood that she needed to raise awareness of the issue among young people. She has recently had a call to say that she could be a potential match for a patient.

Will the Minister address the request to integrate awareness-raising into the school curriculum? Will she talk about how the Department of Health and Social Care can work with international donor banks? That

[*Tulip Siddiq*]

issue has been raised a few times already. How does she intend to spread the word about stem cell donation among young people, especially those from BAME backgrounds?

4.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I thank the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) for securing this important debate on an issue that has been exercising me for the past year. Since I became Minister with responsibility for this area, the disparity in access for people from black and minority ethnic communities to blood, organs and stem cells has been of great concern to me. I have been working with NHSBT on this theme for the past year, and I hope I can give the hon. Gentleman some comfort. We are making some progress, but I want to assure all hon. Members that I am under no illusions about how big this challenge is, for a host of reasons that I will come on to.

I thank the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith) for being here. I read her report with interest and agreed with every word. The principles she articulated are key to increasing donation. If I were to highlight one particular issue, it would be the culture of normalising donation in those communities. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) has just given a beautiful example of how local leadership can do that, and that is something we can all take away.

Whenever we debate a subject like organ and blood donation, everyone brings their own personal story, because we have all been touched by people who have needed a transplant. That is what brings the issue alive for us; it is about saving lives.

My overall objective is to increase the rate of donation across the board. Although it is true that a person is more likely to die waiting for a transplant if they are from a black and minority ethnic community, the fact is that we are losing too many people who are waiting for a transplant. We need a concerted effort to improve the rate of donation from all parts of our society. There is much we can do to achieve that. Hon. Members will be aware of the private Member's Bill from the hon. Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson), which seeks to change the opt-out system. It will be a big help, but it will not solve the problem by itself. There is a lot more we need to do to educate the public about the importance of donation and to dispel the fears and myths about it.

**Colleen Fletcher:** The Minister mentioned the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson). I hope she is aware that stem cell transplantation is very much done when the person is alive, which is what makes it so easy. People do not have to die to donate. I just want to make sure people listening to this debate know that.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** That is a point well made. It is the same for blood, of course—donors do not have to die to give blood. People who give blood do so regularly because they get into the habit and it has become normal. Perhaps we need to do a lot more about stem cell transplants.

I am particularly moved to be having this debate today because only this weekend I lost a very good friend of mine to lymphoma at the age of 47. That brings home how cancer and illness can kill people at a very young age. It will be in honour of my dear friend David Furze that I will do something to reboot stem cell donation.

On the barriers to more donation, some have serious concerns about faith and religious beliefs. Tackling those concerns is a big challenge for us in Government, because of the element of trust. The hon. Member for Bedford mentioned that quite often people do not trust medical professionals, but they trust Government even less. We must find innovative ways of getting that message out. We need the right messengers. Dare I say, the people in this Chamber are among the right messengers? Most of us have respect in our communities and are able to show leadership in our communities. We can go out, speak, raise awareness and encourage donation. I have given NHSBT the challenge to do exactly that.

**Eleanor Smith:** Other organisations are also trying to do that, such as the African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust, but they get very limited resources. One of my recommendations is about sharing resources with groups that are already organised and going out to the community, because with limited resources they can do very little.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The NHSBT strategy has that in mind. Recently, we had a faith summit where we worked with the individuals who are able to go out and give those messages. The approach must be organic. I have also tasked NHSBT to work with me to develop an MP's toolkit to help us to go out in our constituencies and develop the right networks and links. The hon. Lady is right to say that people from these communities will listen to their elders and other representatives, and that is why we need to work through those people. We are doing that with a number of organisations.

Turning to stem cell donation, all hon. Members articulated beautifully the real disparity of access to appropriate treatment. It is only by building and diversifying the UK stem cell register that we will be able to provide the best match for patients. Hon. Members have raised the issue of an international register; the Department funds Anthony Nolan's efforts in this area. Members of the World Marrow Donor Association already promote global collaboration. We will continue to support that as best we can, working with Anthony Nolan and NHSBT.

NHSBT continues to grow both its cord blood banks and bone marrow donor registers, with the explicit intent of increasing the number of black and Asian donors. Overall, we have paid more than £20 million to NHSBT and Anthony Nolan specifically for stem cell donation since 2015. So far, we have made some progress in increasing donations from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, but not nearly enough to address the disparity. We will all continue to make our efforts count in that area.

I pay tribute to the initiative of the Bandhan Bedford Group that the hon. Member for Bedford mentioned. If there is a good local champion that captures local imagination, real progress can be made. We all need to encourage those sorts of activities.

Turning to blood, there is a real need for black donors and donors from the Asian community to increase supplies, not least because they are more likely to suffer from diseases that will require blood transfusions, specifically sickle cell anaemia. We are undertaking initiatives to increase the number of black and Asian blood donors. We are holding “know your type” events in high population areas, where people can learn their blood type with a finger prick test. That will help NHSBT to manage its blood stocks and develop a database of exactly the type of blood that there is a shortage of.

We are supporting others, such as the music of black origin awards, to reach audiences. Those who watch “Britain’s Got Talent”—I watch it—will have seen the B Positive choir, who did so much to raise awareness and were absolutely fantastic.

**Mr Dhesi:** In terms of outreach work, whether with the MOBO awards or otherwise, can the Minister outline the steps that have been taken to reach out via the media? I am not just referring to the national media but the culturally specific and ethnic media, which have a greater outreach in those ethnic minority communities.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I could not give him a definitive answer at this moment in time. I would expect NHSBT to be using those outlets to spread the message. If it is not, I will make sure it does, but I will ask that question and I will write to him with a fuller answer.

Turning to organs, we have discussed that there are around 6,000 people waiting for an organ transplant, of whom 34% are from a black or Asian background. That illustrates the disparity, given that only 6% of deceased donors were from those backgrounds. There is a real challenge to ensure that we are able to save all the lives we can through transplant. We have a big campaign designed to improve the rates of organ donation.

We estimate that if the private Member’s Bill from the hon. Member for Coventry North West successfully passes through Parliament, it will save an additional 200 lives a year. That is not to be sniffed at. As a Health Minister, I would be failing in my duty if I did not do everything I possibly could to secure the passage of that Bill, and I will do that. But that does not alter the fact that we still need more black and Asian people to agree to go on the register. We are working on a number of tools to address people’s real concerns, whether they are about faith, belief or heritage. We need to be able to produce materials that attack misconceptions but do so in an extremely sensitive way to those who will react to them.

Again, I encourage all Members to get involved in helping us to develop those tools and in spreading those messages as best they can. We have a library of resources that are specifically tailored to particular communities, but I am always open to any suggestions for what more we can do, because ultimately this is a very serious injustice that we need to tackle. I have a very large black African Christian community in my constituency, so I am used to engaging with them, having these debates and encouraging them to sign up to the register. We can all do that.

I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Bedford and to all hon. Members who have shown support for this debate. I am under no illusion about the challenge here, but I am very heartened to see that so many Members recognise that this is a problem and are taking positive steps to do something about it. Those are the ingredients for success, but I will not be complacent—this is a tough one for us to tackle. I thank all donors, whether of blood, stem cells or organs, for everything that they have done to save people’s lives.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## British Flora: Protection from Imported Diseases

4.30 pm

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the protection of British flora from imported diseases.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I am extremely grateful to have been granted this debate, particularly as this is such a pertinent issue; the Forestry Commission recently stated:

“The threat to our forests and woodlands has never been greater.”

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and former Mayor of London pledged that 2 million trees would be planted in London between 2009 and 2025. By 2012, I understand only 100,000 had been planted. The current Mayor, Sadiq Khan, promised before his election in May 2016 to plant 2 million trees in his first term, but for some unknown and unwise reason, he abandoned that policy just five months later, in October 2016. Can the Minister cast light on any of that? Can any pressure be brought to bear on all our city mayors to plant more trees? Should that not form part of the Government’s plans to tackle pollution, particularly in our inner cities?

UK imports of live plants have increased by 71% since 1999. There are now more than 1,000 pests and diseases on the UK plant health register. The Royal Horticultural Society has, however, clamped down on imports. All imported semi-mature trees will be held in isolation for 12 months before they are planted at RHS gardens and shows, and evaluation of plant health risk will be incorporated into judging criteria at RHS flower shows. Services relating to our almost 9.3 million acres of forests, woodlands and other trees are estimated to have an annual value of £44.9 billion to the UK economy. Such services include wood processing, recreation and landscaping, as well as biodiversity.

In my part of the world, the beautiful county of Devon in south-west England, a number of diseases have already been found in trees, including phytophthora ramorum, a fungus-like pathogen called a water mould, which has infected large trees widely grown in the UK for the timber market and rhododendrons. Phytophthora ramorum causes extensive damage and death to a large number of trees and other plants.

Red band needle blight, which particularly affects the Corsican pine, is found in most parts of the UK. A five-year moratorium on the planting of the species has been established for Forestry Commission plantations. Here I pay tribute to a fellow Devonian, Sir Harry Studholme, who does such important work as chairman of the Forestry Commission.

Ash dieback is an extremely serious disease of ash trees caused by a fungus. It causes wilting leaves and crown dieback, most usually leading to tree death. Ash dieback was discovered in Devon by the county council, and in February 2016, Natural Devon published a strategy entitled, “Devon ash dieback action plan: an overarching plan to identify and address the risks of ash dieback disease in Devon.” The plan states that there are more than 1.9 million ash trees in Devon, and goes on to say:

“Today we probably have more such trees because many hedges have been permitted to develop into tree lines. The 2012 estimate of nearly half a million roadside ash trees bigger than about

7.5 cm in diameter...confirms that the 1.9 million figure represents only larger trees, and that the true number of non-woodland ash in the county is much greater.”

Finally, sweet chestnut blight was discovered in Devon in December 2016. It is a plant disease caused by the ascomycete fungus, which causes death and dieback in sweet chestnut plants. Restrictions are in place in Devon on the movement of sweet chestnut material.

All of that comes on the back of the change to our landscape. We all remember the devastation that Dutch elm disease caused to the English countryside in the late 1960s and 1970s. That in turn preceded the unprecedented storm of 1987, which uprooted and killed so much woodland. It is unthinkable that we might lose any more of our flora. Act we must.

However, we must give the Government credit here. The Minister will make his remarks later, but I welcome some of the actions taken by the Government and his Department, not least under the stewardship of my former boss in the Northern Ireland Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), when he was Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am extremely pleased to see him in his place. I believe he intends to catch your eye later, Sir Henry.

The appointment in 2014 of Professor Nicola Spence as a chief plant health officer was a huge step forward. She has invested £4.5 million in new patrols and inspectors, which hopefully will stem the flow of diseases entering the United Kingdom. I also very much welcome the appointment this month of Sir William Worsley as the Government’s tree champion. That appointment meets one of the key commitments in the Government’s 25-year environment plan.

Sir William’s task of driving forward planting rates will help raise awareness of the impact our flora have on our planet. Such action by Government will teach us all further about the impact that diseases have on our environment and our economy. When the Minister gets to his feet, I hope he will confirm that Sir William will be fully resourced—or is he to be just another Government tsar with no power? How will his success be measured? Will he have full access to Ministers? I hope to hear positive answers to those key questions on the role of our excellent new tree champion.

I also very much welcome the work of the Action Oak partnership, supported by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, a man who is always ahead of the curve on all matters environmental. The partnership will, among other things, fund research to improve the understanding of the threats to our oak trees and inform best management practices. I understand that it is looking to raise £15 million. Can the Minister confirm how much has been raised since its launch at last year’s Chelsea flower show and say whether the Government will make a financial contribution to that important project?

One of the common threats is xylella from continental Europe. I pay tribute to *Country Life* magazine and the RHS for bringing it to my attention. Xylella has not yet reached our shores, but it could pose a severe threat to our flora if it does. It was found in the United States, Taiwan and Italy, where it has destroyed olive groves in the southern part of the country. Subsequently, it has been discovered in Spain, Germany and France, along with

some of the Baltic states. According to Mark Griffiths in *Country Life*, the EU's reaction to xylella has been "authoritarian"; its vectors have been

"subjected to mass insecticide, an action that has turned plant disease into an ecological disaster",

through a policy of fighting the disease by eradicating everything that might possibly succumb to it.

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reasons for many of these diseases reaching us are twofold: climate change and the movement of people? Her Majesty's Government should understand that it is in our economic, social and environmental interest to have as much early warning as possible of such diseases moving up through Europe. Does he agree that we should require our embassies and other agencies to give much earlier warnings as diseases approach, so that we on these islands can develop strategies to tackle them before they get here?

**Sir Hugo Swire**: My right hon. Friend is precisely right. Forewarned is forearmed, and the more we can publicise these impending diseases coming to our islands, the better. He will acknowledge, as a former Environment Minister, that in some respects the problem is already here. It is about how we stop it from spreading and try to contain it where we can. He has a record second to none on environmental matters, and I am extremely pleased that he is here and taking an interest in the debate.

This rather follows on from what my right hon. Friend said: there have been reports that if the British Government were presented with the problem of xylella, they would destroy not only the infected plant, but all plants within a 100-metre radius. I am concerned that that would amount to uprooting parks, gardens and the greenery of entire neighbourhoods. I would appreciate it if the Minister could confirm what action the Government would take in the event of a xylella outbreak in the UK, and what precautions he is taking to prevent such an outbreak.

As in many of our discussions nowadays, the Commonwealth has its part to play, with the invention of the Queen's Commonwealth canopy. That initiative, which aims to involve all 53 Commonwealth countries and was first conceived by, among others, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), will hopefully save one of the world's most important natural habitats, forests. Three UK projects are involved: Epping forest, Wentwood in Wales and the national forest, which covers parts of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire. Those of us who saw it enjoyed the ITV documentary in April, "The Queen's Green Planet", with the legendary Sir David Attenborough, in which Her Majesty the Queen and Sir David discussed the importance of the Queen's Commonwealth canopy. I particularly look forward to planting a tree in the name of the canopy in Devon in the near future. Will the Minister say what the British Government are doing to raise awareness of and support this Commonwealth initiative?

That leads me on to the defining issue that the United Kingdom faces: leaving the European Union. I am well aware that there is a small amount of irony in the fact that while this debate is about indigenous British flora, many trees and plants in this country are not originally from these shores. Indeed, without our great plant-gatherers of the 18th and 19th centuries, we would not be enjoying

many of the trees, shrubs and plants that we have come to know and love. However, I believe that we have a real chance to deliver a green Brexit by ensuring that trading incentives are used to improve biosecurity in trade, including green trade deals. We have a chance to be a pioneering force in having the greenest possible free trade deals, and I hope the Minister will have a positive view of that suggestion.

I commend the millennium seed bank at the royal botanic gardens, Kew, which achieved its initial aim of storing seeds from all the UK's native plant species in 2009, making Britain the first country in the world to have preserved its botanical heritage. The current phase of the millennium seed bank project is to conserve a quarter of the world's plant species by 2020. I hope that the Commonwealth, and in particular the Queen's Commonwealth canopy, will help with the project through their extensive global contacts, and that the British Government will support those efforts.

My hon. Friend the Minister, who represents another wonderful constituency in the south-west, a bit further to the west than mine, will be aware that I always approach these debates with a shopping list. I have some key asks of him this afternoon, which I hope he will address. I welcome the Government's announcement of £37 million in funding through the tree health resilience strategy. However, how will it be divided up? How much of that money will go to the new tree champion?

Will the Minister commit to tightening up and enforcing more strongly the rules concerning which plant materials can be imported into the UK from the EU and further afield, and how will that be affected once we leave the European Union in March 2019? Could biosecurity be incorporated into any transition deal that the Government agree with Europe? Further to the remarks by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), what instructions can be issued to our embassies and high commissions around the world to identify the threats to the United Kingdom, and some of those plants and trees, to prevent people from trying to export them to the UK?

I am much heartened by the House of Lords EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee's inquiry on plant and animal biosecurity after Brexit. Will the Government implement the Committee's recommendations when the report is published, if they are in line with the stated ambition under the 25-year environment strategy and the tree health resilience strategy?

I could go on much longer on this extraordinary subject, but those with greater knowledge of the subject wish to contribute to the debate. I will conclude by saying that many of us spend our recreational time walking the British countryside. It is the envy of the world. How distraught would we be if it were to be further decimated by diseases that killed our flora? I call on us all to act now to protect our green and pleasant land.

4.44 pm

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry, and a great honour to follow my ex-Minister of State in Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire). We worked very closely together. He made a fine speech, and I congratulate him on bringing this important issue before us. I put on the record that I am delighted that the Minister for Agriculture,

[*Mr Owen Paterson*]

Fisheries and Food will answer the debate. He also served under me, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who was a junior Minister while I was at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am among friends.

When I came to DEFRA, I set the Department four simple priorities over a kaleidoscopic variety of responsibilities. The first was to grow the rural economy. The second was to improve the environment—not protect it, but improve it. The third was to protect the country from animal disease. The fourth, which is relevant to the debate, was to protect the country from plant disease. Little did I know when I came to DEFRA what I was about to walk into.

Back in 1992, *Chalara fraxinea* had been found in Poland and was decimating ash trees there. It later struck me—my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury made a pertinent observation on this—how extraordinary it was that our embassies and consulates were not reading horticultural magazines and reporting back. If we had known then what was about to come to us, we could possibly have done more about it.

However, this terrible disease, which will ravage the 80 million-odd ash trees in this country, came west, probably not helped by the foolish practice of sending seedlings to Holland and then bringing them back as whips and saplings to grow into full trees here. Shortly before I went to DEFRA, the disease was found in a nursery in Buckinghamshire during a routine inspection by the Food and Environment Research Agency, and by the autumn, shortly after I took over, we were in a full-blooded crisis, in which we were trying to handle the issue.

We saw immediately that the disease had clearly followed the Schmallenberg virus, which had blown in, according to the maps, to the eastern tip of Kent and of East Anglia. However—this was unprecedented for DEFRA—we then had a most extraordinary exercise in which, over a week, we mapped the whole country, with amazing co-operation from the public and voluntary organisations and the devolved Administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. I also very much pay tribute to the Republic of Ireland, which played a part in this. We established spots of *Chalara* infection where trees had quite clearly been unwisely brought in from the continent. That immediately set in train the need to set about doing something.

It seemed crazy to me that we had a chief vet, but did not really have anyone in charge of tree and plant health, so I commissioned Professor Chris Gilligan, professor of mathematical biology and head of the school of biological sciences at the University of Cambridge, to chair the tree health and plant biosecurity expert taskforce, which we set up—all helped by Professor Boyd, the chief scientist at DEFRA. The taskforce produced a really good report.

My speech will be quite brief, because I would really like the Minister to reply—I tipped him off about this yesterday—on how many of the report's key points have been implemented. The taskforce's final report came out in May 2013, and DEFRA produced a plant biosecurity strategy in April 2014 that adopted nearly all the key recommendations, the first of which was to set up a UK risk register.

Are there still monthly meetings at DEFRA? I chaired meetings with my chief vet and the newly appointed chief plant health officer at which we monitored all diseases coming towards this country, and those that were already here, which my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon has rightly mentioned. Those were really valuable meetings.

The other key recommendation, which we adopted very early on after receiving the taskforce's interim report, was to appoint a chief plant health officer; as I said, we had a chief vet but not an equivalent in plant health. We rapidly appointed Professor Nicola Spence. She had been a visiting professor at Harper Adams University, which is near my constituency, and is very distinguished. We put her in post, and I remember our benefiting very quickly: as soon as she was appointed, there was a case of a shipment of, I think, heavy electrical plant cables from Turkey. The dunnage—the wooden packing—was infested with some form of insect that was very unwelcome in this country. Professor Spence asked what to do, and I told her to send it back. We sent it back, which I said would send a striking lesson to the whole industry that, now that she had been appointed, I would back her all the way.

That is why the monthly meetings were really important. We would discuss these individual cases, and sightings of diseases—both plant and animal—in distant countries and here. I would like reassurances that those meetings are going on.

We also talked about getting much better intelligence. That was one of the key recommendations. On that front, I went to Russia, primarily to promote exports at a big Russian food exhibition. I visited the really interesting and top-class Russian institute for plant health, which had amazing, state-of-the-art facilities. We agreed with the Minister that we would have regular meetings of scientists and, once a year, a ministerial meeting. Many of these diseases have come from east to west, *Chalara* being the most obvious one. It would be nice to know that we have kept up those meetings.

While we were in Moscow, Martin Ward, who was chief plant officer at DEFRA, was elected chairman of the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation, on which there are 50 countries; it goes well beyond the EU. I would like to know what our contacts are with that organisation, because I thought that was a thoroughly worthwhile body to be part of and keep beefed-up. Martin Ward was a key man when he was in DEFRA and did a great job. I hoped that we would pick up a lot more intelligence there about where the diseases were coming from. We were going to look at procedures for preparedness. For instance, we planted 250,000 saplings to stake out and see where there might be resistance to *Chalara*; we found that that was in a tiny percentage of trees. The tragedy of all that was that we could have done so much work, if we had known back in 1992 that this disease was out there. I would like to know what other programmes DEFRA has embarked on.

There was going to be much tighter protection of borders. Around the same time, I went to Australia and New Zealand. I was absolutely stunned by the incredibly vigorous measures taken there. I remember seeing second-hand JCBs being stripped down and steam-cleaned at Sydney port before being allowed entry. No mud or

dust was allowed in. In New Zealand, I saw intelligence-based monitoring of every single passenger at the airport. Everyone was monitored. There were sniffer dogs and x-ray machines. There were amnesty bins with warnings for anyone who had a sandwich or an apple. It was made absolutely clear on the aeroplane that we were not allowed to bring plant or animal products into either of those two countries.

I noted that Heathrow had virtually no notices and no alerts on the plane. Changing that would not have been an expensive exercise, and we set that in train when I was at DEFRA. I would like to know how we are getting on there. We agreed to give passengers far more early warning that they should not bring these products in, and to print leaflets in various languages, with an easily communicable message, for passengers coming in. I would like to know what we are doing at borders, because there is so much we could learn from countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

With Brexit, we will have a wonderful opportunity. Everybody talks about human movement at the borders; what about the movement of plants, both healthy and unhealthy? The European Union assumes that all plants are healthy, but sadly they are not. I have had meetings with Matt Shardlow of Buglife, which does splendid work on this. He reckons that invasive, non-native species are costing the UK economy £1.7 billion every year, which is shocking. There is a particularly disgusting invader called the Obama flatworm, an invasive flatworm from Brazil. It is already a threat in France, and one has been found in a pot plant in a garden centre in Oxfordshire. It was originally imported from the Netherlands.

As you know, Sir Henry, you will not find anyone in the House of Commons more in favour of free trade than me, but we need free trade in healthy products. Interestingly, in its latest publication, Buglife goes so far as to say that we should ban all pot plant imports, which would be a very strong measure. In DEFRA, we were looking at much more vigorous quarantining. Some of these imports are mad; for example, bringing from south-east Asia a reasonably mature tree with half a tonne of earth on it is just inviting trouble. Even the smallest pot plants can include a few eggs. We were going to look at longer quarantine periods, so that the bugs could incubate, and then have much more vigorous measures for sending them back. We will be able to do that after Brexit. We will be able to run and control our own borders.

I hope that the UK will become a haven for healthy plant products. I want to say the British Isles, because we worked extremely closely with the Government of the Republic of Ireland. They were really co-operative, and they have a massive interest: think of the tragedy of the decimation of ash populations across northern Europe. I had hoped we could begin to develop healthy plants and repopulate. We could be a reservoir of healthy plants that could be used to repopulate parts of Europe that had been blighted.

Other Members want to speak, and we very much want to hear from the Minister. I would like a résumé of where we are up to. Lastly, we promised we would increase skills and get more people interested in this area, and in training in plant diseases; we were going to put more money into that. I heartily congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon on this debate on a really worthwhile subject.

**Sir Henry Bellingham (in the Chair):** I plan to start the wind-ups at five past five, which leaves us exactly 10 minutes. I would be grateful if the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) would split the time between them.

4.56 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I will adhere to the five-minute limit, Sir Henry. First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) on presenting the case so well. He said others with expertise would speak after him, but he spoke at the beginning with a lot of expertise, as did the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), and we appreciate that. I have not held any of the positions that the right hon. Gentlemen used to hold, but I come as an MP from Northern Ireland, so perhaps that gets me into the club. I am not sure whether it does or not, but there we are. It is always a pleasure to speak on these issues. In his introduction, the right hon. Member for East Devon referred to the beauty of his constituency, but my constituency of Strangford, which the right hon. Gentleman has visited on numerous occasions, is equal to his, if not better.

The issue of protection for our habitats is something that I have a great interest in. Whenever I get off the plane from Heathrow to Belfast City, the advertising on the walls clearly states, “No plants and no food”. It is very strict. That is what we see displayed at Belfast International airport, Belfast City airport and also Londonderry airport, so it is clear that we have a policy in place.

On my farm I have planted some 3,500 trees and created duck ponds. My sons and I are fastidious about pest control to encourage a thriving fauna haven, and I am not alone, as many country sports enthusiasts have the same passion for conservation and the issue of protection, as does the right hon. Gentleman. I was pleased to learn that there would be tighter controls on importing plants to prevent pests and diseases from damaging our native trees. The right hon. Gentleman has said that, and I will say it from a Northern Ireland perspective.

We have had numerous ash dieback outbreaks in Northern Ireland, some in my constituency. In Ballywalter, not too far away, Lord Dunleath’s estate has had an outbreak in the past. Oak and ash trees are among the species at risk from imported diseases and pests such as xylella and the emerald ash borer beetle. Xylella was first detected in 2013 when it destroyed olive trees in southern Italy. It spread to France, Spain and Mediterranean islands. It could arrive in Britain in imported plants such as rosemary, lavender, olives, oleander and almond.

In my constituency, Japanese knotweed is a major issue with people not understanding that trying to pull it out or cut it down merely spreads the problem. We must do more to educate people about the dangers of dealing with foreign plants, along with our own. Although the nurturing of Japanese bonsai trees for 50 years is a lovely thought, try dealing with Japanese knotweed that attacks plants and undermines the very foundations of homes and buildings throughout the Province. Japanese knotweed has become a real problem in my constituency around some of the houses, and land has been blighted. An area in the centre of Newtownards cannot be developed

[*Jim Shannon*]

for six years because of the presence of Japanese knotweed. Weed killing has been undertaken, but a period of time has to be allowed to make sure that the incubation has not arisen again.

When I tried to help a constituent address their knotweed issue, I ran into problem after problem with Government Departments unwilling to step in and stop the spread. Instead of one garden being sprayed by a specialist at the right time of year for the prescribed time, a row of houses is now literally infested and losing their plants, and possibly their foundations. We were told that the weed killer was reasonably priced and the constituent could do the job themselves, but that did not really work. We need a targeted effort from Government Departments and the local councils to address the diseases and stop them destroying our beautiful UK.

I want to ask the Minister a quick question. There is a farmers' market event today in the Members' Dining Room, and I spoke to some of the people there. Different regions of the United Kingdom are represented, including Northern Ireland. I understand that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland have a cross-border body that involves the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and other Government bodies. However, although the framework is in place, there is no financial assistance for that cross-border body so that it can move forward and address the issue of invasive species coming to Northern Ireland, but also to the Republic. We need to dedicate funding to that purpose for the greater good of all our plants and fauna. I ask the Minister whether there is any intention to widen the attack on the invaders in our gardens.

I fully support the Department's decision to implement stricter controls, yet it is a matter of closing the gate after the horse has bolted—we have all these foreign invaders already attacking our trees and wildlife and we must defend them. That needs to be targeted and done on a UK-wide basis. Across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, we need to encourage the growth of our own beautiful plants and wildlife, free from attack by other plants that have no right to be thriving on our shores.

5 pm

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to be involved in this very important and timely debate. I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I should also say that I am a trustee of a charity called Plantlife, which is doing a lot of work on invasive species and plant health and trying to encourage wildflowers.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), a former Secretary of State, said, invasive species are costing our economy at least £1.7 billion a year. I remember the plant retailers coming to me, when I was in his Department, to whinge about the increased biosecurity measures that he was rightly implementing. I listened to them, but I am afraid that I just said to them, "Look, you really have got this wrong. Your industry is in part responsible for a devastating effect on our natural environment. You have to face facts: we are now moving into almost a military-style

campaign to attack the invasive species and the diseases that are coming to this country, and you have to wise up to it." They were quite shocked, but I was in turn quite shocked at their lack of biosecurity over decades, at the failure of Governments over decades to implement proper biosecurity, and how we were happy to import nearly all the stock of young trees of certain species that we were planting.

As my right hon. Friend said, we have followed the progression of Chalara as, like Schmallenberg disease and blue tongue, it has progressed across the country. At the weekend, I was looking at a wood in Berkshire and I estimated that about one third of the canopy was ash, and that will be gone in a very short space of time. We can learn from this. We can prevent other diseases that could be devastating to the remaining stock of trees and plants, if we learn from our mistakes in the past. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) is absolutely right to say that.

I hope that the Minister will, in his reply, comment on Action Oak, which is spearheaded by Woodland Heritage. It is based quite near Alice Holt forest, and there is good reason why it should be there and able to build on the information at that centre of excellence. But funding is the key. We welcome the £500,000 that DEFRA promised, but £15 million is needed, and it would be great to know how close we are to getting to that.

Plantlife has identified what it calls its dirty dozen of invasive species, including American skunk-cabbage, broad-leaved bamboo, giant rhubarb, cotoneasters, Himalayan balsam, the Hottentot fig and Japanese knotweed. These invasive species are not only causing huge environmental damage, but creating a huge cost for us to deal with. What my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire did at DEFRA was quite right. He applied a logistician's approach. I can remember that as a result of foot and mouth, when we had a very serious drought—this was before he was Secretary of State—we developed the same concept as was applied at the time of foot and mouth. It was called birdtable meetings. All the experts were brought in on a regular basis. They were very executive: they were called birdtable meetings because no one sat down—rather like the Privy Council—people just got the business done and then everyone went away and got on with it. I think that that kind of approach is required now to deal with this issue.

Of course, one measure that we need to talk about is husbandry. If dealing with Chalara requires the ash tree to be cut down and burned or taken away, or just cut down at the first sign, that is easy for a larger state or an organisation such as the Forestry Commission, but it is hard for a small farmer or someone with a few ash trees in their garden. Who will take responsibility for encouraging people to do the right thing? It requires a logistician's approach to dealing with it.

We should beware easy solutions. I remember people coming to see me and saying that we should spray acres of woodland with copper sulphate. Instead of listening to those people, who seemed to have lifted their solutions off the internet, I listened much more readily to the chief scientific adviser at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who said that that would have a much more malign effect on our biodiversity and plant life.

I, too, have visited New Zealand and Australia. While I was still many thousands of miles away from arriving, I was hit by how hard-wired biosecurity is into every aspect of the travelling experience. The airline and the airport staff are tuned in to it, and there is signage, so it is impossible to move without it being apparent. We need to develop a much more overt and proactive form of biosecurity. I hope the Minister will give us some reassurance about that.

5.6 pm

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to sum up for the Scottish National party with you in the Chair, Sir Henry. I congratulate the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) on securing this debate and on his speech, which I will come to. Given the subject of the debate, it would be remiss of me not to put on record my congratulations to Mairi Gougeon MSP on her nomination to the Scottish Government as the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment. It is a nomination because it is the practice in Scotland that Government nominations to ministerial office must be passed by Parliament. One of her early introductions might be to read the *Hansard* of this debate to get a sense of some of the challenges that she will face in her job, not least from the likes of ash dieback.

The right hon. Gentleman made a typically forthright and challenging speech to the Minister. He spoke of the rate of planting trees elsewhere in these isles, but he did not mention that Scotland created 73% of all new woodland in the UK in 2016-17. Its target is now 15,000 hectares of new woodland by 2024-25, which is ambitious but achievable.

The right hon. Gentleman obviously spoke about ash dieback, which is a considerable problem in Scotland. Some 20% of all 10 km grid squares in Scotland have confirmed ash dieback. It appears that some ash trees may have some tolerance or resistance to infection, so it would be interesting for scientists to get to the bottom of how that came about. I take the point that mistakes were made in how we targeted prevention, but we need to ensure that a new strain of ash trees can be bred for the future.

The right hon. Gentleman also spoke about xylella, which I understand is the subject of EU emergency measures to control the movement of affected species such as plane, elm and oak. He also posed some questions to the Minister about strategy should it arrive in this country. He made a forthright and knowledgeable speech, to which I am sure the Minister will seek to respond.

The speech by the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) was obviously partly influenced by his time in ministerial office and the knowledge he gained there. He also posed several questions to the Minister, and we look forward to hearing the answers.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke of his contribution to the flora of Northern Ireland. He rightly spoke about the pervasive problem of Japanese knotweed, which is a horrendous issue. From personal experience of constituency cases in Airdrie and Shotts, I know that it is expensive and challenging to deal with. The right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) described a military-style campaign, and that is exactly what is often required to deal with Japanese knotweed. It is a horrendous issue. He also

spoke of the major challenges of ash dieback, and not just for larger organisations. He rightly emphasised the challenges faced by smaller landowners in ensuring that they can respond if an outbreak sadly arrives in their area.

I should mention briefly some of the areas that we are working on in Scotland. Plant health is at the heart of Scotland's thriving natural environment, our rural economy and our wellbeing. The aim of the Scottish plant health strategy is to safeguard agriculture, horticulture, forestry and the wider environment from plant pests, from 2016 to 2021 and beyond.

One of the greatest threats to biodiversity worldwide is invasive non-native species. That threat is particularly pronounced for fragile island ecosystems—I am not just talking about the British Isles, but the islands within the British Isles. Disease has already been spoken about by the right hon. Member for East Devon and the hon. Member for Strangford, and I think particularly of Japanese knotweed.

Scotland has led the way in the UK in creating a statutory framework to prevent the introduction and spread of non-invasive species, but we have concerns about the UK Government's Brexit strategy and the power grab, including over environmental protections. We are not opposed to UK-wide frameworks when they are in Scotland's interests. However, they must be agreed rather than imposed, and they must happen in a manner that respects and recognises devolution. The Scottish First Minister has been clear that any threat to Scotland's distinctive and ambitious approach to environmental standards and climate change would be completely unacceptable. Imposing a UK framework could result in substantial damage to the work that has already been done by the Scottish Government.

For example, we used EU rules to ban genetically modified crops in Scotland to protect our environment and support Scottish agriculture, and there is no such ban in England. A UK-wide framework in that area could see the ban lifted, thereby threatening Scotland's clean, green brand and the future of Scotland's £14 billion food and drink sector. Scotland has gained international recognition for our work on climate change and the circular economy, so we clearly do not want to put that at risk.

5.12 pm

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I congratulate the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) on securing this debate. Biosecurity is a huge issue that does not often get its turn in the spotlight.

The right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) all made important points. I share their concerns about the problems we have with the many invasive species. In our village, we have had to deal with Japanese knotweed, and we have huge issues with Himalayan balsam. Until I was elected to this place, I had a personal mission against Himalayan balsam encroaching on to our land, which I have now handed over to my husband. Removing invasive species is a terribly difficult, time-consuming and costly exercise. There is then the dreadful problem of dealing with diseases such as ash dieback, which we have also discussed.

[Sue Hayman]

Biosecurity is terribly critical but perhaps does not get enough attention. It is also vital for our biosecurity that we retain access to EU markets. We have to make sure that the right resources and infrastructure are in place to handle the continued movement of animals and plants. We need our trade with the EU to continue to be as frictionless as possible. Most importantly, regulatory standards must not be compromised by Brexit. The right hon. Member for North Shropshire said that we need to trade in healthy plants and I could not agree with him more.

Prospect recently submitted evidence to an inquiry by the House of Lords EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee into biosecurity, recommending better training for plant health officers, an issue that has already been mentioned. We need to establish a viable training programme for new and established inspectors, plus joint training ventures with the Horticultural Trades Association and the Royal Horticultural Society. The evidence also recommends more long-term investment in agricultural and environmental science, as well as that Ministers should put together a plan to deliver future biosecurity collaboration with the EU post-Brexit.

There are significant worries that we may weaken biosecurity protection and open ourselves up to risks and threats through trade deals, unless we do everything we can to ensure that sufficient checks and resources are put in place to mitigate those risks. Brexit could mean the end of shared biosecurity information—such as that provided through the European rapid alert system for food and feed, and through the European Union notification system for plant health interceptions—for the intercepting of pests and diseases on imported goods.

We are at the end of a huge plant supply chain from other EU states. This could be significant for the future of British biosecurity. The current system of sharing intelligence of biosecurity threats within or bordering the EU must continue in some form. Given the volume of UK-EU trade, it is critical that we continue to collaborate. The cost of dealing with pests and pathogens once they are in the UK is significantly more expensive and much more challenging than preventing their introduction in the first place, as has been mentioned by right hon. and hon. Members. That shared expertise is vital to being able to plan and prepare for future challenges. Any loss of that integrated approach would pose a risk to UK biosecurity. Will the Minister commit to retaining the precautionary principle in implementing biosecurity legislation?

We need a closer relationship with EU standards post-Brexit, but that may not provide the protections we need in the future, because we will have to continue to update legislation and practices, to tackle any new challenges and threats as they emerge. We know that climate change is spreading pests and diseases to new locations, and new trade deals will require new supply-chain assurances and the expertise to manage those risks. New legislation also needs to be flexible enough to enable quicker reaction to new threats and to improve the move from pest eradication, to containment, to management.

Another problem is that we simply do not know how much plant material is imported from the EU every year, as it is not checked, so we do not have any idea

what resources we will need to check it. Have any estimates been made of the volume of plant imports from the EU? If those imports are not checked properly, does the Minister agree that there will be risks for biosecurity?

The current assumption on checks is that they will have to happen at supermarket distribution centres, for example, because we do not have the capacity to do so at the points of entry. There is a risk that inspectors could be overwhelmed by the volume of additional inspections and therefore miss dangerous pests or diseases in other imports. To combat that, I understand that the Animal and Plant Health Agency is recruiting about 40 new inspectors and seven new managers, which is excellent news, but it is hard to see how they can be trained in time. There has never been a requirement for training on this scale before. Will the Minister comment on that and let me know if the training is being done face to face or online, as there are clearly concerns about the issue?

Currently, non-EU imports are managed through an HMRC customs computer system. The volumes are relatively low and require advanced notice. Inspectors are asking whether that system is appropriate for EU imports and whether it could cope with additional volume. Does the Minister believe that the current HMRC plant import customs IT system will be able to deal with the imports from the EU? Has any assessment been made of that? Is a new system being designed? If so, on what basis and will it be ready in time?

I am aware that I have posed quite a number of questions to the Minister and I appreciate that he may not be able to answer them all today. If that is the case, I would be grateful if he would write to me with the answers.

5.19 pm

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) on securing this debate.

As a number of hon. Members have pointed out, protecting our country from pests and diseases is vital to safeguarding our environment. The loss of veteran trees, some of which have been around for hundreds of years, due to some of those diseases, is particularly tragic. I remember as a boy growing up in Cornwall that we had beautiful elms right around the farm. I can remember my father having to cut them down, year after year, because they had died. It was a tremendous tragedy, and since then threats to plant health have only increased. That is why, as a number of hon. Members have pointed out, we have to be constantly on our guard and strengthen our responses.

My right hon. Friend highlighted in his comprehensive speech many of the current threats. As he pointed out, we have the problem of ash dieback, which prompted changes to our plans some years ago. In the west country we have a particular problem, as he said, with phytophthora ramorum, which is particularly prevalent in areas of the country with wet conditions and species that are prone to that disease. We have, with our iconic oaks, the problem of oak processionary moth and acute oak decline, which has been around for a number of years. As he pointed out, recently in his part of the

world we have seen the arrival of sweet chestnut blight. In addition, we are now monitoring and are vigilant against threats, including xylella at the top of the list, and others such as plane wilt, which would be a major threat to some of our trees in urban areas such as London, and the emerald ash borer.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), who was the first Secretary of State I served under in my post in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—I think we are now on to Secretary of State No. 4—asked a very specific question with, I have to say, a hint of scepticism in his voice. He wanted to know whether the recommendations of the tree health and plant biosecurity initiative expert taskforce, which he commissioned and which reported in 2014, had been implemented. He will be delighted to know that those recommendations have been implemented, and many of the important changes that he put in place are still with us today. In fact, we have built on some of the architecture and infrastructure that he put in place.

For instance, we now have a chief plant health officer; indeed, Nicola Spence, our current chief plant health officer, is here today listening to the debate. We have also developed a prioritised UK risk register, which has in the region of 1,000 pests registered on it. We have strengthened governance arrangements. My right hon. Friend asked—with, I think, an especial hint of scepticism—whether our monthly biosecurity meetings, which he used to chair, continue. Perhaps he thought that they had fallen by the wayside after he had gone, as meetings often do. I reassure him that that monthly biosecurity meeting is critical and still takes place. He will be delighted to know that my noble Friend Lord Gardiner, who leads on that element of the DEFRA portfolio, is every bit as tenacious as he was in identifying threats and ensuring that we take them seriously.

The fourth recommendation was that there should be improved border security and strengthened import regulations, which I will deal with a little later. The final recommendation was that there should be a new plant health information portal. We have introduced all those recommendations and taken them further.

As a result of the biosecurity strategy launched in 2014, the plant health service now operates, pre-border, things such as systematic screening of risk, at-the-border checks—inspections at entry points—and also an inland strategy that uses both aerial and ground surveillance to reduce the risk of pests and diseases entering the country, and to manage the impact of established pests.

Turning first to the pre-border checks, we try to stop pests and diseases before they even arrive, and our international horizon scanning helps us spot new risks and take action to stop them. Risks are tracked through a fully published UK plant health risk register, which, as I have said, now has more than 1,000 plant pests and diseases registered on it. Where necessary, we take action to drive up international biosecurity standards, ensuring that regulations are robust in both Europe and beyond. For instance, we secured stronger EU-wide protections against the threat of xylella.

Turning to the border, we have invested more than £4.5 million to strengthen our border security, recruiting new plant inspectors and enhancing training. Our border inspectors carry out more than 100,000 document checks

and 30,000 physical checks a year of consignments deemed to be of higher risk. They are highly effective in comparison with their peers, so the UK consistently makes more interceptions of harmful organisms than any other EU member state. In fact, the interceptions we make account for about 40% of the total number of interceptions that take place at EU level.

**Jim Shannon:** I referred earlier to the fact that there is a skeletal body in place in Northern Ireland and the Republic—it involves the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and others from the Republic of Ireland—but it has no funding. I do not expect the Minister to have all the answers—that would be unfair—but will he come back to me with an answer about the funding, so that we can get it going?

**George Eustice:** I was going to try to touch on that; it was on the long list of issues that I wanted to cover. There is already an all-Ireland approach to plant health between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and we co-operate closely with the Republic of Ireland on plant health. For instance, we invite it to the UK plant health co-ordination meeting. A lot of joint working takes place in that regard.

In 2016, some 445 different pests were intercepted and identified at UK points of entry; in 2017, the figure was 401. We cannot eliminate all the risks, but we have robust contingency plans in place so that we can take prompt, effective action to tackle the pests and diseases that make it through. In February 2017 we published the generic contingency plan for plant and bee health, which sets out how the DEFRA chief plant health officer will co-ordinate and lead the response to an outbreak of pests or diseases in plants or bees in England.

We also have ongoing extensive aerial and ground-based surveillance programmes, including Observatree, a nationwide network of more than 200 volunteer surveyors trained by the Forest Research agency and the Woodland Trust. We have increased national protection at home by introducing statutory notification schemes for certain tree species and securing protected zones, which prevent the import of trees that do not meet stringent conditions. A protected zone effectively bans the import of trees unless they have been grown in an area free of the relevant disease and are accompanied by a plant passport certifying that. We have introduced more protected zones than any other member state. Since the introduction of statutory notification schemes for imports, there has also been a significant reduction in the number of tree imports. For instance, we have seen a 60% reduction in plane tree imports.

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon raised the issue of budget, which is obviously important. There is a £37 million budget for tree health between 2012 and 2020, which has been spent on research, monitoring, risk assessment, surveillance and management and will support the priorities of our tree health resilience strategy. He also asked about Sir William Worsley, our new tree champion. I know the budget is being discussed and any budget he needs will be funded out of the provision we have for tree health, alongside other priorities. Having that tree champion has been an important step forward.

[*George Eustice*]

5.29 pm

Both my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) and my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon raised the issue of the Action Oak programme, which was launched only recently by my noble Friend Lord De Mauley. We have made progress with it: so far, £1.6 million has been raised towards it. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire raised the issue of border controls. This week, we are running a “Don’t Risk It” campaign, with visible posters and information for the public.

Finally, on the issue of the European Union—no debate in this place is complete without contemplating what might happen with Brexit—leaving the EU is an opportunity to examine all our national biosecurity measures, to ensure that they are as robust as possible and that we are doing everything we can to protect our country. We are working to secure the best EU exit deal, balancing frictionless trade in plants with robust protection against pests and diseases from day one, but certainly there will be opportunities as we leave the EU to adopt a slightly different approach where we deem it necessary to protect our trees and promote plant health in this country.

**Sir Hugo Swire:** I thank all right hon. and hon. Members from the Conservative party, the Scottish National party and the Democratic Unionist party, and the rather lonely spokesman for the Opposition Labour party, for taking part in this debate. It is a subject that I would have thought would interest hon. Members from all over the country, and I hope that when we debate these matters in future, as I am sure we will, we will have greater representation. I think we are all agreed, in a rare form of consensus, that this is a serious problem and one that we need to get a grip on if we are to preserve our landscape for future generations.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the protection of British flora from imported diseases.

5.30 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Wednesday 27 June 2018

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Arms Export Policy: Argentina

**The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):** I would like to inform the House of a change of the Government's arms exports policy in relation to Argentina. This change will lift additional restrictions which were imposed in 2012, at a time when the Argentine Government was escalating actions aimed at harming the economic interests of the Falkland islanders.

Since the election of President Macri in December 2015, the UK's relationship with Argentina has been improving. I visited Buenos Aires in September 2016—the first visit by a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister since 2009. During the visit an historic UK-Argentina joint communiqué was agreed that established closer co-operation across our bilateral relationship (including in defence) and secured important benefits for the Falkland islanders. The Foreign Secretary also visited Buenos Aires in May 2018, the first Foreign Secretary visit to Argentina since 1993, in a further demonstration of the improving bilateral relationship between the UK and Argentina.

Following these positive developments the Government believe it is appropriate to now lift the additional 2012 restrictions.

Under those restrictions it has been the British Government's policy not to grant an export licence for any military or dual-use goods and technology being supplied to military end-users in Argentina, except in exceptional circumstances.

Our general position now will be to continue to refuse licences for export and trade of goods judged to enhance Argentine military capability. However, where like-for-like equipment is no longer available, we may grant licences where we judge they are not detrimental to the UK's defence and security interests.

Licence applications for equipment and defence technology which meet the above criteria will still be assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria (the "consolidated criteria").

The United Kingdom takes its export control responsibilities very seriously and operates one of the most robust export control regimes in the world. We rigorously examine every application on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, and remain prepared to suspend or revoke licences should the level of risk increase.

[HCWS799]

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### NHS Pay Review Body and Agenda for Change Pay Deal

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** I am responding on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the 31st report

of the NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB). The report has been laid before Parliament today (Cm 9641). I am grateful to the chair and members of the NHSPRB for their report.

The Government welcome the 31st report of the NHS Pay Review Body, which endorses the "Agenda For Change" multi-year pay and contract reform deal (2018-19 to 2020-21).

NHS staff do a fantastic job in delivering world-class care. Even with increasing pressures on the NHS due to, among other things, an ageing population and changing public expectations, they work incredibly hard, always putting patients first and keeping them safe while providing the high-quality care we all expect.

We have already announced that, to secure the future of the health service as it approaches its 70th birthday, we have increased NHS funding by an average 3.4% per year, which will see the NHS receive £20.5 billion a year in real terms by 2023.

The Government accept the NHSPRB's observations and are very pleased to confirm their acceptance of the "Agenda For Change" multi-year pay and contract reform deal.

The new deal will see nearly 1 million NHS workers benefit over three years and help deliver better value for money from the £36 billion "Agenda For Change" pay bill, with some of the most important changes to working practices in a decade.

The deal includes a range of pay and non-pay proposals that will benefit staff and patients. Most NHS staff below the top of their pay band will benefit from pay increases through the restructuring of the pay bands—higher starting pay, removal of overlapping pay points and shorter pay scales.

From this year the lowest NHS starting salary will increase year on year from £15,404 to £18,005 in 2020-21.

The starting salary of a nurse will rise to £24,907 in 2020-21 which will have a significant impact on retention and recruitment issues.

The deal also guarantees fair basic pay awards for the next three years to staff who are at the top of pay bands—a cumulative 6.5% over three years.

The agreement will put learning and development right at the heart of local annual appraisals, helping to improve the experience for staff, ensuring they demonstrate the required standards for their role before moving to the next pay point. We know that getting appraisals right helps improve staff engagement and through that better outcomes for patients. The deal also commits NHS employers to support staff to improve their physical and mental health, helping to reduce sickness absence, increasing capacity for patient care.

This is a major step forward. The agreement reflects the Government's public sector pay policy that pay flexibility should be in return for reforms that improve recruitment and retention and boost productivity.

During the NHS trades unions consultation on the AfC framework agreement, the Department of Health and Social Care received a number of representations from non-statutory non-NHS organisations that provide NHS services seeking additional funding on the same basis as NHS bodies.

It is important to stress that the AfC reforms were those, based on the AfC employment contract (and all the terms and conditions) the NHS Staff Council agreed could help the NHS recruit, retain, motivate and boost the productivity/capacity of its workforce.

We know that there a small number of non-statutory non-NHS organisations that provide NHS services, employ existing and new staff on the AfC contract and will be required to implement the reforms.

I believe it is right that these organisations should receive a share of the additional funding made available for AfC staff employed by NHS bodies listed at annex 1 of the NHS terms and conditions of service handbook; each employ existing and new staff on the AfC contract, are required to implement the deal and will need to meet the costs of doing so.

From 2018-19, the AfC pay deal will apply to existing and new staff on the AfC employment contract employed in both NHS bodies and non-statutory non-NHS organisations that provide NHS services, the terms and conditions of which are set out in the NHS terms and conditions of service handbook.

I have asked my officials to write directly to all NHS commissioners and provide them with further detail of the eligibility criteria for additional funding during the three years of the pay deal, that will apply to those non-statutory non-NHS providers of NHS services.

In line with the Chancellor's commitment at Budget 2017, the Government will release the £800 million already set aside to support the pay deal for 2018-19 in England. Barnett consequential will flow to the devolved Administrations in the usual way. Following the recent announcement on the NHS long-term funding settlement, for the remaining two years of the deal (2019-20 to 2020-21) funding will be met from the settlement. The long-term settlement will provide the NHS with increased funding of £20.5 billion per year in real terms by the end of five years.

[HCWS803]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Drugs Policy

**The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd):** On 18 June, I announced the creation of an expert panel to advise Ministers on individual applications to prescribe cannabis-based medicinal products. As of today, the panel is now accepting applications, and will meet for the first time later this week. The clinical panel will be chaired by the chief medical officer for Northern Ireland, Dr Michael McBride. Further members of the panel will be announced this week.

Clinicians must be at the heart of the process. The panel will consider applications from GMC registered practitioners who are listed on the relevant specialist register and with an active licence to practise. These applications must be countersigned by a medical director or an equivalent. This will provide the reassurance that prescribing these currently unlicensed and potentially untested products is in the best interests of the patient. Applications will not be accepted from members of the public.

The panel will assess applications against several criteria. These include:

Evidence of exceptional clinical circumstances, in line with existing principles applied to individual funding requests within the NHS; or,

Whether there is evidence from existing clinical trials or other clinical data which indicate that a patient will benefit from a cannabis-based medicinal product; or,

Whether the clinician considers there is an otherwise unmet special clinical need that could be addressed through use of a cannabis-based medicinal product by the patient.

In considering these criteria, the panel will be assessing whether the attending clinician, who has the responsibility for the case, is making an evidence-based and reasonable request for a specific case. The panel cannot make clinical decisions for a patient not under their care. The full terms of reference and criteria, along with details for clinicians on how to apply, are available on gov.uk.

The panel will not be responsible for issuing licences: only the Home Secretary or the Department of Health in Northern Ireland can give the formal approval of a schedule 1 licence—both, however, will have due regard to the panel's recommendations.

As I and the Home Secretary made clear last week, we will be led by clinical decision making. To streamline the application process as much as possible, for applications made through the expert panel to prescribe cannabis-based medicinal products, the Government will not require a site visit unless absolutely necessary. The Government will also not require a fresh DBS check from clinicians, or other individuals involved in the treatment of a patient involving a cannabis-based medicinal product, where they are practising under an existing DBS check. Waiving these requirements will ensure that any application for a licence submitted following consideration by the expert panel, where a visit and fresh DBS check are not required, can expect to receive a drug licensing decision within two to four weeks. Should the panel be presented with an emergency case, the panel will consider cases as quickly as is necessary dependent on the medical circumstances.

The Government are also committed to reviewing the fees paid for licences that are awarded as a result of the advice of the expert panel. That review will take place urgently and will conclude before summer recess, with any legislation laid before the House at the first available date following its conclusion. In the meantime, for applications for a licence made by the NHS, neither individual patients nor their families will be asked to make any financial contribution towards the cost of any licence that may be issued.

On 19 June, the Home Secretary announced a two-phase review looking at the scheduling of cannabis. Part one of the review will consider the available evidence of the medicinal and therapeutic benefits of cannabis and cannabis-based products. Professor Dame Sally Davies will take this part forward. If part one concludes that there is evidence of medicinal and therapeutic benefit, then part two will consider the appropriate schedule for cannabis-related products, based on the balance of harms and public health requirements. Part two will be led by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), with clinical input as required. The ACMD will not reassess the evidence issued by Professor Dame Sally Davies which I have received today.

[HCWS802]

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### UK Support to UNRWA

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt):** The UK remains firmly committed to supporting Palestinian refugees across the near east. The UK recognises the UN Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) important mandate from the UN General Assembly to support and protect Palestinian refugees.

UNRWA is a necessary humanitarian and stabilising force across the near east, providing millions of Palestinian refugees with hope and opportunities every day. Its basic services, including food, education and healthcare, provide a life-line to the 5 million and more Palestinian men, women and child refugees across the region, and enable them to live in dignity until a negotiated peace agreement.

The UK is concerned about the possibility of service suspension as a result of the exceptional funding deficit that UNRWA is facing this year. The Syrian conflict has caused more than 50,000 Palestinian refugees to be on the move again, and increasing numbers of refugees are food insecure and vulnerable to shocks. Recent violence in Gaza has added to the burden on UNRWA's health services. UNRWA's work has never been more critical.

In the face of these pressures, the UK has committed to deliver its next round of financial support earlier than originally planned to help meet the growing needs of Palestinian refugees across the region. We will disburse £38.5 million to the agency in recognition of the severity of the deficit and the importance of service delivery. This includes £28.5 million that I committed at the UNRWA Rome pledging conference earlier this year, and £10 million of funding that the UK is bringing forward from next year's budget in response to the exceptional cash flow challenges UNRWA is facing.

The UK will continue to work closely with UNRWA to reach a secure and sustainable financial footing. We have welcomed UNRWA's efforts to become ever more efficient and cost-effective, and are committed to working closely with them, host authorities, and fellow donors to maintain a realistic and achievable pace of reform.

We communicated the UK's ongoing support to the UN Secretary-General at an UNRWA pledging conference in New York on 25 June. We were pleased that 20 donors announced contributions, or their intention to contribute, to the 2018 budget of UNRWA. I will continue to urge the international community to come together to ensure that UNRWA can maintain its essential work and find ways to ensure continuity of essential services to Palestinian refugees.

All of us who care about stability in the region and about the rights and needs of this vulnerable group of people need to do our part to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian refugees. The UK has welcomed UNRWA's efforts to broaden its donor base and encouraged partners to step up with more funding and more predictable disbursements. The UK has highlighted our concern about the impact on the activities of UNRWA that any unexpected reductions or delays in predicted donor disbursements might have. While we acknowledge the greater burden shouldered by some, we urge all donors to honour their commitments.

While the support and services provided by UNRWA are essential, ultimately there needs to be a just, fair, agreed, and realistic solution to the Palestinian refugee question as part of a negotiated peace agreement. The UK is firmly committed to a two-state solution to provide the long-term answer for Palestinian refugees.

Peace will come only through fresh negotiations between the parties, supported by the international community. It is critical that both Israelis and Palestinians return to direct negotiations and urgently prioritise steps to resolve the situation in Gaza. The UK remains firmly committed to this process.

[HCWS801]

## JUSTICE

### Female Offender Strategy

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke):** Today, I am launching the Government's female offender strategy following our commitment in the November 2016 "Prison Safety and Reform" White Paper.

If we are to make any significant difference for victims, families and wider society, we must break the cycle of reoffending by taking the necessary steps to understand and address the underlying causes of offending.

The evidence tells us that vulnerability is not just a consequence of crime, it is also a driver of offending behaviour, preventing many from breaking out of a cycle of reoffending.

There is also growing evidence that short custodial sentences do not work in terms of rehabilitation and reducing reoffending. Short sentences generate churn which is a major driver of instability in our prisons and they do not provide sufficient time for rehabilitative activity, especially when we also know that many of these offenders have complex needs and vulnerabilities. In most cases, we know that the best way to meet those needs is to help people get access to the services they need in the community.

Female offenders can be among the most vulnerable of all, in both the prevalence and complexity of their needs. Many experience chaotic lifestyles involving substance misuse, mental health problems, homelessness and offending behaviour, which are often the product of a life of abuse and trauma. Of those female offenders who are in custody, many are sentenced for nonviolent, low-level but persistent offences, often for short periods of time.

If we take the right approach to female offenders—one that addresses vulnerability, follows the evidence about what works in supporting them to turn their lives around, and treats them as individuals of value—it could have substantial benefits for victims, families, and offenders themselves.

This strategy sets out the Government's commitment to a new programme of work for female offenders, driven by our vision to see:

- fewer women coming into the criminal justice system
- fewer women in custody, especially on short-term sentences, and a greater proportion of women managed in the community successfully; and
- better conditions for those in custody.

To achieve this, we are shifting our focus from custody to the community. Across Government, we are investing £5 million funding over two years in community provision

for women. We are committing to working with partners to assess options for delivering a “residential women’s centres” pilot in at least five sites across England and Wales. We want to build the evidence base about what are effective, sustainable and scalable options in the community for diverting women from entering and re-entering custody on short custodial sentences. We will not be proceeding with plans to build five new community prisons for Women.

Given that a higher proportion of women have dependent children living with them prior to imprisonment, incarceration of women may have a disproportionate impact on families and children and increase the risk of intergenerational offending. That is why we are commissioning Lord Farmer to continue his work on the importance of family ties in improving outcomes for offenders, by conducting a further review into female offenders.

Only through effective partnerships, at both a national and local level, which take a holistic approach to tackling the causes underlying the behaviour of female offenders,

can progress really happen. That is why the strategy outlines a framework for taking this forward with partners, one which is locally-led, partnership-focused and evidence-based.

As part of this, we will work across Government and with other national and local partners to develop a national concordat on female offenders, which will set out how services should be working together in partnership to identify and respond to the often multiple and complex needs of women involved in the criminal justice system.

We must ensure we are accountable for the priorities set out in this strategy. Therefore, we will publish an annual update on the progress of the work of the strategy and reform the Advisory Board on Female Offenders to give it a greater role in monitoring the delivery of commitments in this strategy.

The female offender strategy is available in full at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy>

[HCWS800]



# Ministerial Correction

*Wednesday 27 June 2018*

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Human Rights

*The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on Tuesday 26 June 2018.*

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Yesterday the Foreign Office, rather pathetically, used the cover story of a trip to Africa to throw the media off the Foreign Secretary's scent. Can I suggest to the Minister that his boss makes a real trip to Africa to focus urgently on the violence in western Cameroon, the instability gripping the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the danger that next month's elections in Zimbabwe will not be free, fair or democratic?

**Mark Field:** May I point out that the Foreign Secretary has visited Africa on no fewer than nine occasions during the past year? Although I assume there will not

be too many difficult votes to be dealt with during the course of the year ahead, I am sure he will have that sort of commitment. The hon. Lady rightly points out that, in places like Cameroon and the DRC, we are highly respected as a Government and will continue to be so.

*[Official Report, 26 June 2018, Vol. 643, c. 752.]*

*Letter of correction from Mark Field:*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) during Questions to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

The correct response should have been:

**Mark Field:** May I point out that the Foreign Secretary has visited Africa on no fewer than **four** occasions during the past year? Although I assume there will not be too many difficult votes to be dealt with during the course of the year ahead, I am sure he will have that sort of commitment. The hon. Lady rightly points out that, in places like Cameroon and the DRC, we are highly respected as a Government and will continue to be so.



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# MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

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**not later than  
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